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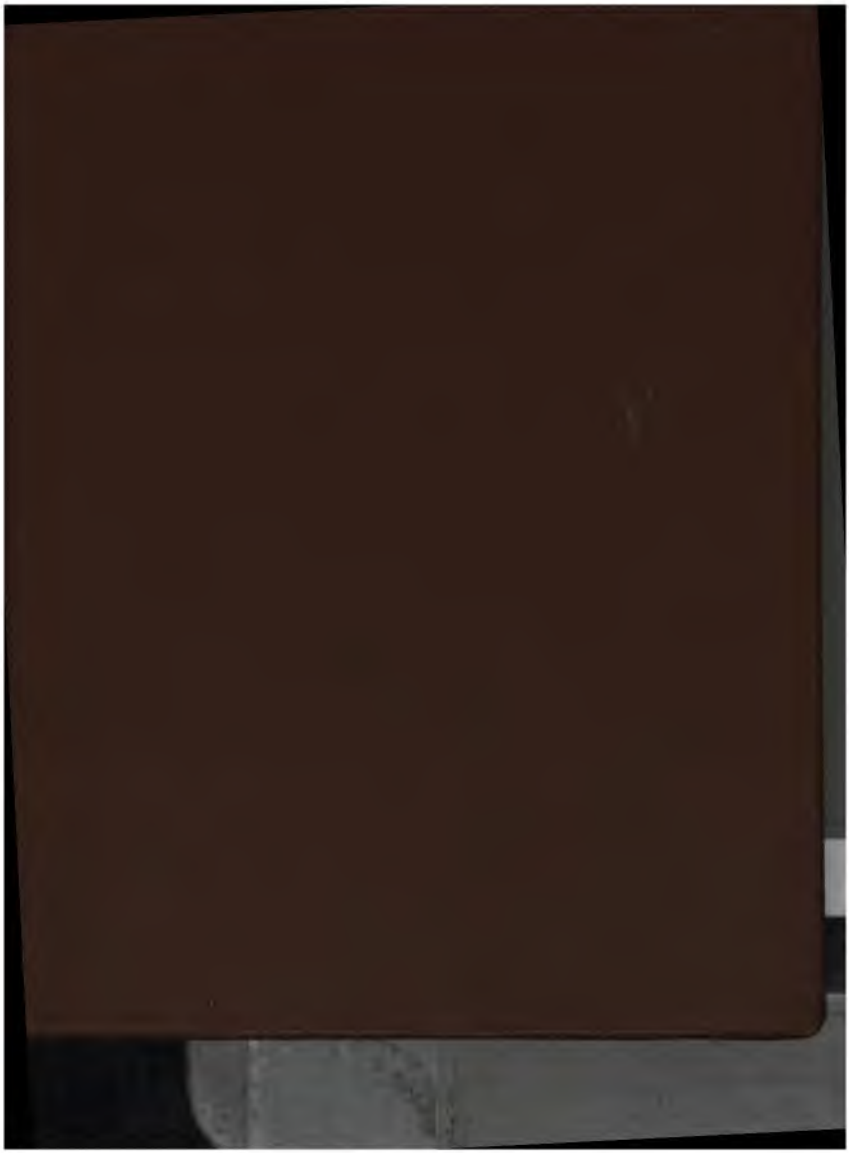

GRANTLEY MANOR.

A TALE.

BY

LADY GEORGINA FULLERTON.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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BERNH. TAUCHNITZ JUN.

1847.

GRANTLEY MANOR.

CHAPTER I.

It had rained all day. Towards five o'clock the sun was making a desperate effort to shine for a moment before his final disappearance behind the grassy hill which rises in front of Grantley Manor. A heavy mass of clouds, just tinged at the edges by a line of purple light, was slowly rolling along the sky, overhanging the Abbey Woods, Heron Castle, and the ridge of muirland which extends far up the valley of the Grant. The red maples and the yellow beeches in the park wore their gaudiest autumnal hues, though many of their bright-coloured leaves were strewed on the grass beneath, or floated down the rapid stream, as it made its way through the valley to a tide river, some twenty miles further to the south. A fine November day has an indescribable mildness peculiar to itself, a calm and mournful beauty which pervades the soul, and soothes it into a deep tranquillity. On the day and at the hour of which I am speaking, two persons were standing together by the stone balustrade which separates the flower-garden of the manor-house from the

park beneath it. One of these was an elderly woman, whose set features and vacant gaze might have indicated either a total absence of thought, or an absorbing pre-occupation. She seemed to be either pensive or sleepy. By her side was a girl half-sitting, half-leaning, on the parapet; her slight and graceful figure was wrapped in a fur pelisse, which hung about her in heavy folds, her arms were crossed on her breast, her eyes sometimes fixed on the ground, sometimes raised towards the road across the park, and then hastily withdrawn. Now and then she snatched a China rose from the bush beneath her, and scattered its leaves about with reckless profusion.

Margaret Leslie was a beautiful girl. Her eyes were of that peculiar colour which varies from iron-grey to the deepest violet; her nose was small and aquiline, and her mouth admirably formed, but slightly curved downwards at the corners, so that when she did not smile there was something perhaps not quite agreeable in its expression, but the smile was so enchanting and so frequent that there was hardly time to miss it before it beamed again in all its brightness. Her eyelashes were black and long, and her hair fell, not in stiff ringlets, but in rich brown flakes round her white and slender neck. As she watched the flying rose-leaves, and vainly attempted to guide their descent into the basin of a small fountain under the terrace, her narrow delicately pencilled and arched eye-brows contracted

into a frown which might have kept in order anything less unmanageable than flying rose-leaves. Indeed to expect that they would not blow about in the breeze which was just getting up as the sun sank behind the hill, was sanguine; but Margaret's expectations were rather apt to be unreasonable. For instance, she was at that moment almost provoked that Mrs. Dalton, her governess, did not perceive by a kind of intuition that she was tired of watching for the travelling carriage which according to her calculations ought to have brought her father to the gates of the avenue an hour before, and which had not yet made its appearance.

"Really, dear Mrs. Dalton," she said at last, "I cannot stay here any longer. As my father is not yet arrived, I am sure he will not come in time for dinner."

"My dear, it is only six o'clock."

"How short the days are getting, then! What a blazing fire they have made in the hall!" Margaret exclaimed, as she threw open the entrance door.

"Is Mr. Sydney arrived?" she inquired as she crossed the billiard-room, and rolled the balls about in an impatient manner.

As they tumbled headlong into the pockets, she said, half aloud and half to herself,

"I shall never love my father as much as Walter Sydney!"

"Oh, but my dear you ought," suggested Mrs. Dalton.

Margaret turned suddenly round, and while she untied the strings of her black lace bonnet, and pushed back from her cold cheeks the curls that hung heavily about them, she replied, —

"When will you learn, dear Mrs. Dalton, that *you ought* is no argument at all?"

"When will *you* learn, Margaret, that *you ought* should be the most powerful argument in the world?"

It was not Mrs. Dalton who had ventured on this reply. It was made by one who always spoke the truth to Margaret, and from whom she was always willing to hear it, for she loved and respected Walter Sydney, and had often been heard to assert that he was the only person she knew who made the truth agreeable, and on this particular occasion she was so glad to see him, that even had the remark displeased her, she would still have held out her hand to him as she passed through the room. After closing the door, she opened it again, and said to him with a smile, —

"If you knew the subject of our dispute, you would not, perhaps, have taken Mrs. Dalton's part. But you always think it right to assume that I am in the wrong."

He shook his head, but she was gone; and he heard her on the stairs and in the passages, carolling away like a bird on the wing.

This Walter Sydney was a man of about thirty-five or thirty-six. He was tall and thin; his complexion sallow; some might have thought that there was beauty

in his pale high forehead, in the lines of his face, and in the expression of his eyes; but the awkwardness of his figure, and a want of ease in his manner, generally destroyed that impression, and the usual remark of those who saw him for the first time, was, "What a strange-looking man Mr. Sydney is!" To Margaret Leslie he had always appeared the personification of goodness and of wisdom, and she looked up to him with the strongest affection. He had been very intimate with her father from an early age. Heron Castle, the grey turretted house which stood in the midst of what were called the Abbey Woods, on the hill opposite to Grantley, was his father's place, and he and Henry Leslie had been friends and companions from the days of their boyhood. Leslie was the older of the two, and when Walter, a shy and awkward youth who had been entirely educated at home, and who, with a passionate love of study, had an insuperable dislike to new scenes and new associates, joined him at Oxford, he welcomed him with a warmth and a joy which excited the surprise of his own gay and dissipated friends.

Before his first departure for Oxford Henry Leslie had determined in his own mind to marry his cousin, Mary Thornton, a gentle quiet girl, whose father was the clergyman of the village, and who had been his and Walter Sydney's constant companion ever since they could remember. He had called her in play his

little wife, and she had taken it so much for granted that they were to be married as soon as they were old enough (for he had told her so whenever they had parted with fresh tears or met with fresh joy at each successive holidays), that when he, one day, seriously asked her if she would indeed be his wife, she looked at him with unaffected surprise. Their engagement seemed to her only the continuation of a state of things to which she had never anticipated any interruption; their relations approved, their friends congratulated; they corresponded during the university terms, and spent the vacations together at Grantley. They sat in the gardens, they strolled in the woods. He taught her to ride, and she sketched for him his favourite hunters. He made her read Walton's "Angler;" and while he fished she sat patiently for hours by his side, holding in her breath lest she should frighten the trout away. In the autumn many a time did she walk across the turnip-fields to meet him, and to hear how many brace of partridges he had killed, and how well Juno had pointed; and on many a misty morning in winter did she ride on the white pony he had given her, to see the hounds meet and to watch for the distant view-halloo! In the evening they sat in the old library and examined together the map of his estates! She learned the name of every village, and planned new roads and new plantations. They retired to the billiard-room that he might knock the balls about, and make all sorts

of hazards before her wondering eyes; or to a recess in the drawing-room, that he might conquer her at chess; or to the pianoforte to sing together sundry duets, while Walter Sydney, then a shy and silent youth, laid down his book and listened; and his mother (who, having found nothing but disappointment in her own marriage, watched a love-affair with that tender interest which the sight of happiness, understood but not experienced, awakens in a gentle and subdued spirit) invariably grew absent at whist and revoked; an enormity which her husband justly resented, though he bore it in his own opinion with truly angelic patience, only suddenly putting down his cards, and saying in a mild impressive manner —

"Pray, Mrs. Sydney, may I be allowed to ask *are* you playing at whist, or *are* you *not?*"

This produced a start, a readjustment of the spectacles on her nose, and a renewed attention to the game, coupled with the ejaculation "Dear children! They seem made for each other!" And so these dear children seemed to think, for they troubled their heads singularly little about any one else.

And thus the course of their true love ran on as smooth as if Shakespeare had not pronounced against the existence of such a case. And their's *was* true love, in spite of Shakespeare, in spite of approving parents, in spite of the easy channel which favourable

circumstances had wrought for it. True happiness it was when on a lovely summer's day Henry Leslie and his bride went to the village church and pledged their faith to each other in the eyes of their delighted families and of a rejoicing tenantry; when the bells rang their loudest peal of joy, and heartfelt acclamations rent the air, as they walked down the narrow pathway towards their home.

And there was happiness in that home, for they tasted that bliss of paradise, which alone, Cowper says, has survived the fall. Neither temper nor neglect shed one bitter drop into their crystal cup: while it lasted, it was unimpaired and pure. A child was born to them, the Margaret of our story, and when she was carried to the village church and the sacred waters of baptism poured on her infant head by the same hand which had joined theirs in marriage, Mary looked at her husband, and in that look there was perhaps too much happiness for this world of ours. Two years later a grave was dug under the yew tree in the old church-yard, and to it was conveyed all that remained on earth of the blooming bride, of the young mother, of the Mary who had so often played as a child on that spot, and who had chosen it herself for her grave, when a few days before her death, supported by her husband, she had reached the place where their first words of love had been spoken and where she now wished to be buried, that he might never look upon

that view or sit under that tree without a thought of her

"Who in her spring-time died."

At her request no boasting inscription, no pompous memorial was placed on her tomb; the date of her birth, of her marriage, and of her death, and a simple stone cross alone marked the spot. Henry Leslie had flung himself on the ground in an agony of grief on the day of her funeral, and when Walter Sydney spoke words of comfort to him, he shook his head despairingly, and bade him be silent, for life had lost for him all the bright hues with which youth and hope had gilded it. Truly had he loved his wife, and truly had he mourned for her; but what is true is not always deep, and what is vehement is not always lasting. After many days had come and gone his grief grew calm; and then new hopes and interests arose, and other joys and other pains, and various alternations of misery and of bliss visited him in the course of fifteen years which he spent partly in Italy, partly in the Peninsula where he served as a volunteer, and subsequently in long voyages by sea and land. Meanwhile there was one at home who visited, day by day, the grave where the friend of his childhood and of his youth was buried, and who gathered and treasured up in secret the spring-flowers that grew there; and there was one blooming flower which he watched with unremitting love and care. Walter Sydney's affections

were few and deep; for the child of Henry and of Mary Leslie he would willingly have laid down his life. Much as his books and his writings usually absorbed him, there was no day and no hour, that he would not lay them gladly aside, if a merry peal of laughter summoned him to his window to welcome a little horsewoman proudly mounted on her Shetland pony.

Henry Leslie had left his child in the care of his parents at Grantley; both had died during his absence, and Margaret had been entrusted to Mrs. Dalton, an old fashioned governess, whose plans of education were superintended by Mrs. Thornton who was established at the vicarage, and by Walter Sydney, in whom Leslie had more confidence than in any member of his own family. It was lucky for the little girl that such was the case, for, an only child, an heiress, and a beauty, she ran considerable risk of being utterly spoiled, if Walter had not watched over her with a father's care and a brother's tenderness. He soon discovered in her character those impetuous qualities which are equally powerful for good or for evil according to the direction which they take. The overweening indulgence with which she was constantly treated, had at least, among many evils, one good result; Margaret was the truest of human beings, and from the moment that she first lisped a few words in baby language, no falsehood had ever passed her lips. There was no

moral courage in this; it was the result of a frank and fearless nature, and of an education which, though it had not sufficiently checked the bad, had not impaired the good impulses of her character. There was no merit in it, I repeat; but it was beautiful—as a bright day, as a clear sky, as a pure lake are beautiful! It was something fresh from the hands of God and unspoiled by man: and often when Walter gazed into the child's blue eyes, or parted the curls which clustered on her fair open brow, the words of commendation which our Lord pronounced on Nathanael rose to his mind, and he would murmur, as he pressed the little girl to his heart, — "One in whom there is indeed no guile."

As she grew older, and became conscious of thoughts which her grandmother and her governess could not comprehend, and of capacities which they knew not how to direct and therefore strove to stifle; like the unskilful husbandman who would dam up the stream he knows not how to turn; she went to Walter, and to him she revealed them in language which he understood, for genius has a simplicity of its own which appreciates and is appreciated by the simplicity of childhood. When she first perceived that religion meant something beyond going to church once a week, and repeating the catechism by rote, that poetry was not merely verse-making — that conversation was not always mere talk—that life was not child's play; when its

forms and its spirits—its realities and its mysteries—appeared to her in a new shape, and with a strange power; it was again to Walter that she turned, and from him that she learned glorious truths which give to our destiny a meaning, and to our actions an end. He gave her books, and while he carefully guarded her mind from what might taint, he filled it with high thoughts and noble images. Self-sacrifice in every form was the theme of his lessons, the object of his reverence; and Margaret listened with a kindling eye and a flushing cheek when he recited deeds of heroism, and lauded acts of self-conquest, the real true courage of the soul; when he spoke of the honour due to the martyr who dies for his Faith, to the patriot who bares his breast to a thousand foes, to the missionary who confesses Christ with the scalping-knife before his eyes, to the Sister of Charity who braves the horrors of pestilence in the loathsome abodes of disease; and lastly, not least, to those lonely martyrs — to those unnoticed confessors—to those meek souls who in the humble walks of life, in desolation unrepining, go through a fiery trial, with no witness but that God,

> "Who to the wrestlings of the lonely heart,
> Imparts the virtue of His midnight agony."

He taught her that self-denial practised in secret, and pangs endured in silence for conscience' sake, no less deserve the palm of martyrdom than the courage that carries a man to the scaffold or the stake. He illustrated

his meaning by various examples; he called her attention to those heroic actions which are sometimes performed by the poor with such sublime simplicity, such unconscious magnanimity. For instance, he made her read and compare the historical record of the noble answer of Louis XII. of France, when in the presence of an applauding court, he pronounced that sentence, which has been handed down to an admiring posterity, "It is not for the King of France to avenge the injuries of the Duke of Orleans;" with the police reports of an obscure trial in the newspaper of the day, in which a poor collier bruised and disfigured by a cruel assault, begged off his brutal enemy all punishment, and refused all pecuniary compensation, simply urging that the man had a wife and children and could not well spare the money, and that he would himself take it as a great favour if the magistrate would *pass it over;** and he asked her if the monarch's deed was not of those that have indeed their own reward on earth, and the collier's did not number among those which are laid up as treasure in Heaven — there, where the rust of human applause does not dim, and the moth of human vanity does not consume their merits, and forestall their recompense? The virtues of the poor! — Their countless trials! — Their patient toil! — Their sublime because unknown and unrequited sacrifices! History does not record them. Multitudes do not applaud them.

* See a similar example in a trial in the *Times*. September 1844.

The doers of such deeds travel on their weary journey through life, and go down to their graves, unknown, unnoticed, though perchance not unwept by some obscure sufferers like themselves; but a crown is laid up for them, there — where many first shall be last, and many last shall be first! Wearied creatures who after working all day with aching heads perhaps, or a low fever consuming them, creep out at night to attend on some neighbour more wretched than themselves, and carry to them a share of their own scanty meal. Mothers who toil all day, and nurse at night sickly and peevish children. Men, who with the racking cough of consumption, and the deadly languor of disease upon them, work on, and strive and struggle and toil, till life gives way. Parents whose children cry to them for food when they have none to give. Beings tempted on every side, starved into guilt, baited into crime; — who still resist, who do *not* kill, who do *not* steal, who do *not* take the wages of iniquity, who do *not* curse and slander — and who, if they do *not* covet, are indeed of those of whom "the world is not worthy." And *we* — *we* the self-indulgent — we the very slaves of luxury and ease — we who can hardly bear a toothache or a sleepless night; *we* go among the poor, and (if they are *that* to be which, must require a higher stretch of virtue than we have ever contemplated) give them a nod of approval, or utter a cold expression of approbation. They have done their

duty, and had they *not* done it, had they fallen into the thousand snares which poverty presents, had the pale mother snatched for the famishing child a morsel of food, had the sorely-tempted and starving girl pawned for one day the shirt in her keeping, stern Justice would have overtaken them, and Mercy closed her ears to their cries. And if they have *not* transgressed the law of the land, but for a while given over the struggle in despair, and sat down in their miserable garrets with fixed eyes and folded arms, and resorted to the temporary madness of gin, or the deadly stupor of laudanum, then we (who into our very homes often admit men whose whole lives are a course of idleness and selfish excess), turn from them in all the severity of our self-righteousness; and on the wretched beings who perhaps after years of secret struggles yield at last — not to passion, not to vanity, but to *hunger*, — with despair in their heart and madness in their brain, — we direct a glance, which we *dare* not cast on guilt and depravity when it meets us in our crowded drawing-rooms in all the pomp and circumstance of guilty prosperity!

Such were Walters' thoughts, such were his sympathies; and though he seldom declaimed on the subject, he felt deeply, and acted accordingly. His influence over Margaret was great, but it affected her way of thinking more than her mode of life. He could inspire her with a love for what was great and good,

but it is only by a course of patient and diligent training bestowed on a child or resolutely practised in after-life by ourselves, that we learn not merely to feel but to do; not only to admire but to imitate.

It is not to be imagined that because Margaret's mind was naturally formed to admire what was heroic, and had been trained by Walter to appreciate the true heroism of patience and self-denial, that at the present time of her life she was either a heroine or a model of self-control. His lessons and his example were so far useful to her, that they presented to her mind an ideal standard which prevented her from looking upon her own character and habits with the complacency which she would otherwise have indulged; for it must be confessed, that whereas at times her heart beat high at the ideal glories of Joan of Arc or the Maid of Saragossa, at others it beat with a very hurried pulsation at the least appearance of danger threatening the pretty Mistress of Grantley. It must be owned, that though her eyes would fill with tears at the account of two Sisters of Charity setting out on foot from Paris in one of the coldest winters of this century to go and nurse the sick at Barcelona, and never leaving the afflicted town till the plague had passed away, she was apt to shut herself up for days together in her comfortable boudoir, with her little feet on the fender, and her graceful figure reclining in the softest and most luxurious arm-chair, because it was too cold, or too

wet, to venture out to the cottages or the school, and that Mrs. Dalton going alone would do just as well, especially as her grandmamma was so afraid of her catching cold. I wish that it was not on record that Margaret had been heard to declare on other occasions, that there never was such nonsense as her grandmother's fancies about her catching cold.

It is true that she read with enthusiasm the lives of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and St. Margaret of Scotland — those loveliest of women, those gentlest of saints, daughters of a royal race, and the brides of heroes — who with their own hands attended upon lepers, and nursed with a mother's tenderness those from whom their own mothers turned with disgust; but it is unfortunately equally true that she could hardly bring herself to visit Mrs. Jones, an old woman in the village whom Walter had particularly recommended to her notice, because her room was intolerably close, and that she was apt to show her the wound in her leg.

It is true, that as she heard the account of Mrs. Fry's first visit to Newgate, when, quietly shutting the door behind her, she advanced alone, the Bible in her hand, among the fierce and reckless women who at that time were controlled only by armed men, and addressed them as sisters and as friends, in those tones and with that expression which none can conceive who have not heard her, and which those who have can

never forget — it is true, that as she listened, her heart burned within her, and she longed to go and do likewise; but at the next opportunity of exercising courage, of conquering disinclination, of enduring pain, or overcoming weariness, these high resolves and noble projects were apt to vanish into air, or to swell that amount of "good intentions" with which St. Bernard tells us that Hell is paved. The fact must be confessed, Margaret was a spoiled child.

Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, who were perfectly unlike each other in every other respect, concurred in one line of conduct, that of indulging and flattering her to the utmost extent. He was one of those gentle, kind-hearted persons, who can see no imperfections in those they love, and though not himself deficient in understanding, would praise his wife's singular good sense, and Margaret's extraordinary docility, in a way which severely tried the patience of his old friend, Mr. Sydney, Walter's father.

Mrs. Thornton was a good woman; nobody could deny *that;* but to her goodness she joined a profound conviction of her own wisdom; a steady, simple-minded conceit, which carried her through every circumstance of life with an amount of self-gratulation, and through every conversation with a degree of authoritative folly, that was inexpressibly amusing. She was unboundedly credulous, and had a habit of adopting opinions put forward by others as her own, and of maintaining them

dogmatically, in happy unconsciousness of their incompatibility with those she had herself advanced a quarter of an hour before. She was never startled at anything, never surprised, never puzzled, by the grossest inconsistencies or embarrassed by the most direct evidence. Between her and Mr. Sydney there was a close alliance, joined to a little tacit enmity. She kept him in a state of mingled irritation and amusement. There never was any occasion of meeting, whether at dinner, luncheon, picnic, or party, that she was not by his side, pouring into his ear oracular sayings, political axioms, mysterious predictions, theological denunciations, and scientific discoveries, to all of which he responded by a short sudden laugh, or if she looked for further encouragement, by an assenting growl. On the subject of education, Mrs. Thornton adopted in turn the most contradictory theories, but they succeeded each other so rapidly that they usually evaporated in talk, and as nothing ensures success so much as fixity of purpose, Margaret's very fixed determination *not* to be managed, outlived all the systems of management which her grandmother successively adopted.

Mrs. Dalton, when she first came into power, had made an effort to establish her authority, but the attempt had so signally failed, owing to the steady resistance of her pupil, seconded by her grandmother's unequivocal support, that poor Mrs. Dalton was forced

to strike her colours, and abandon the unequal contest, contenting herself in future with a display of power which was rather agreeable than otherwise to Margaret, who treated her governess somewhat as the subjects of a constitutional monarchy treat their sovereigns, professing humbly to obey them, as long, and just as long, as their will is in perfect accordance with their own.

Having thus attempted to give some notion of our heroine's character, education, and position in life, we will now turn to the library, where, after some hours of vain expectation, the party, assembled to welcome Colonel Leslie's arrival, were about to break up for that night.

"Another day of expectation! another day of disappointment!" exclaimed Margaret, as she held out her hand for the candlestick which Walter was lighting for her on her way to the door. "Is it not extraordinary that my father does not come or write?"

"It is indeed," answered Walter. "When you left him in town, he told you positively that he would be here yesterday. Did he not?"

"Yes, to be sure he did, and actually held out his finger to me at parting. Do not look angry, Walter! You know how anxious I had been to see my father; with what joy I heard the news of his arrival after this long absence, and with what impatience, what emotion, I hastened to meet him in London. During the tedious

hours of the journey I had but that one thought. During the night we stopped at Newbury, I never closed my eyes — listened to the striking of each hour, and longed for daylight; and when we reached London, when we dashed through the streets, I could hardly sit still; and when I arrived — (I shall always hate that hotel) — 'Colonel Leslie was out!' 'Gone out for a walk!' I sat down alone in that square odious drawing-room, and waited — waited two hours! and then he came in —"

"And was not his manner kind then?"

"Oh dear, yes! very kind. Nobody is ever unkind to me. Dr. Bartlet, or Lord Donnington, when they call here, are very kind. Come, Walter, do not let us deceive ourselves. I have never had a thought I have not told you, and I must e'en out with it. My father does not care a straw about me, and the sooner I make up my mind to it the better. I shall be a dutiful daughter to him, at least I 'll try," she said, quoting the burden of an Irish song she had just been practising, and smiling though two big tears were rolling down her cheek.

"This is unreasonable, dear Margaret," said Walter. "You had worked yourself up into a state of romantic excitement about your father's arrival, and pictured in your own imagination a scene that was not realised; and because poor Leslie's manner is naturally quiet —"

"Is *your's* so very vivacious?" interrupted Margaret, with rather a saucy expression.

"Oh, mine! Mine is the manner of an old dog, who cannot help wagging his tail when he sees those he loves."

"O Walter! dearest Old Walter! I wish you were my father."

A strange expression passed over Walter's face, but he answered:

"Well, I cannot say I do, for I should then deprieve Leslie of a treasure which I am sure he values; and you do not know, Margaret, how much I love your father."

"Not more than *me?*"

Walter looked as if he could not very well love anything more than the beautiful little creature before him, but he shook his head, and said:

"Come, come, Margaret, you must be contented to give way to others. You are too fond of the *first place* everywhere."

Mrs. Thornton joined them while Walter was speaking, and instantly took up the cudgels for Margaret:

"And so she should be; she has always been brought up to it; and who should have the first place among us, if it is not Margaret? As to your vexing yourself, my dear, about your father's not being glad to see you, it is foolish, really very foolish, because —"

"I did not say he was not glad to see me," inter-

rupted Margaret, with a heightened colour, for she did not always bear with patience her grandmamma's animadversions.

"But, my dear, how should he be glad to see you? It is only by proving people that we learn to love them," and she glanced at Walter with a glimmering notion that that last phrase had been in his line; "I never loved my children when I did not know them."

"And when was that?" asked Margaret, somewhat captiously, for it must be confessed that her temper was a little ruffled that day.

"When they went to school, my dear, I always said to my boys, 'Now, my dears, I have done with you; I have nothing more to say to you. No schoolboys ever care for their mothers, so I wash my hands of you. Don't talk to me till you are grown up; don't let me hear of you; don't come near me!'"

"I do not remember," remarked Walter, "that John and Eustace obeyed your instructions. They seemed to me to stick close enough to you during the holidays."

"Oh, they never minded a word I said to them," replied Mrs. Thornton. "I always was a cypher, a nothing, a nonentity to them. They would follow me about because I gave them sugar-plums, but they did not love me, they did not care for me; there was no link between us."

Again she glanced at Walter, for that last expres-

sion had been decidedly poetical, and this time it was not lost upon him, for he smiled, as he again presented the candlestick to Margaret, and was about to reply, when the sound of carriage wheels, the barking of the dogs, and the loud ringing of the bell, announced the arrival of Colonel Leslie to his home after ten years' absence. The doors were flung open, two dogs rushed in, Margaret stepped forward, Mrs. Thornton looked flurried; Mr. Thornton, whose gout prevented his rising as rapidly as he could have wished, stretched out his hand, while on his fine open venerable face a joyous smile said "Welcome," better than any words would have done. Walter looked graver than usual. Colonel Leslie kissed Margaret on the forehead, shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, and then wrung Walter's in silence. And then there followed one of those spaces of time which are spent by every person present in trying to look very happy, and to feel happy, while they can hardly resist the consciousness that they are extremely uncomfortable, and yet that it is imperative not to suffer themselves or others to think so. Colonel Leslie, indeed, did not seem to think it necessary to make much effort. He sat down in an arm-chair and poked the fire. Mr. Thornton smiled, took snuff, cleared his throat, and then asked him (how difficult to find a question to put to a man whom you have not seen for ten years) if he had a pleasant journey. Mrs. Thornton, who seldom allowed anybody to

answer a question for themselves when she was present, took the words out of Colonel Leslie's mouth, by asking him in return, "How could it be a pleasant journey, my dear? How can you expect a man, who has travelled all over the world like Leslie, to see anything to admire at home in our poor little country?"

"Why, my dear Mrs. Thornton," blurted out her husband, who had through life persevered in reasoning with her, a practice which other people had generally dropped, "you might as well say that Leslie would have no pleasure in seeing us all again, because he has been used to a set of queer foreign-looking faces."

There was a dead pause; somehow or other this last speech seemed to have disconcerted Colonel Leslie, and Mr. Thornton to have felt the moment that he had uttered it, that it would have been better left unsaid. This redoubled the embarrassment of the whole party. Margaret, whose cheek had been deepening in colour ever since her father's arrival, felt it was quite incumbent upon her to speak. First she looked at Walter, but he had sat himself down by the fire, his long face longer than usual; his long legs extended before him, beyond what appeared their natural size, and his eyes fixed on the fire as if they would never look on anything else again. At last by some happy inspiration she seized on the front paws of one of the fine dogs which had come in with her father, placed them on her knees without any regard for her white muslin

gown, and said timidly as she glanced at Colonel Leslie, "What a beautiful creature this is, papa!"

He started as if from a reverie, looked attentively at her, sighed deeply, and by a sudden impulse held out his hand. Margaret seized it, drew near to him, and from that moment a considerable thaw took place in the general aspect of things. Tea was brought in for the second time, and Walter, who had perceived the affectionate look which Leslie had cast on his daughter, and the renewed expression of pleasure in those eyes in which he could never bear to see a cloud, shook off his oppressive gravity. He and his friend began to talk of their former haunts and old acquaintances; Mrs. Thornton, who, like the canary birds, always chirped the louder when others conversed, was encouraged to hold forth again in her usual tone; and her husband slowly recovered from that painful shock, the consciousness of having said the wrong thing at the wrong time. And now we must, in another chapter, explain why Mr. Thornton's remark had better not have been made, and how it came to add to the embarrassment of the assembled family at Grantley Manor.

CHAPTER II.

A SHORT time after the death of his wife, Henry Leslie had left England in order to travel for a few months in Italy. The change of scene, and the excitement of the journey, to a man of twenty-three, who had never before been out of his own country-town, soon roused him from the depression which had driven him from his home to seek health and amusements abroad; and by the time he had travelled through France, and spent a few weeks at Turin and at Milan, he was just in that state of mind and of feelings which most readily admits new impressions. The acuteness of grief had subsided, and a vague desire for fresh interests and new excitements had taken its place. A latent taste for painting and for poetry, for the artistic and imaginative side of life, took strong possession of Leslie's fancy as he advanced into Italy. The influence of its brilliant skies — the magic of its natural beauties — the memories of the past — its departed glory and its living charm — operated more and more powerfully on his soul; and for the time being the quiet English country gentleman was transformed into a passionate admirer of that strange land whose very name is a spell; whose very defects are attractions,

where desolation is bewitching; suffering poetical, and poverty picturesque; where life resembles a dream — where the past is almost more tangible than the present — where an eternal vitality springs from the bosom of perpetual decay, like pure flowers floating on the surface of a dark and stagnant pool; life in its brightest and most glowing colours — death in its most poetical and soothing form, meet each other at every turn. With her cloudless skies and her tideless seas — the unchanging grey of her olive groves — the brilliant hues of her mountains and of her streams — the solemn silence of her cypress groves — the noisy throngs of her joyous people — her gorgeous churches, with their myriads of living worshippers — her gigantic tombs, with their countless multitude of unknown tenants, Italy is at once and emphatically the land of the living and the land of the dead. This Leslie felt; he did not seek society — he did not enter into noisy amusements — he left his hours and his days to take their natural course — he floated down the current of life, while Nature and Art unrolled before him visions of beauty and scenes of enchantment which appear to those whose souls they touch, not as novelties, but as the realisation of a presentiment or of a dream. Have we not, some of us, in our hours of sleep, known a land, a spot, a home, which in our dreams we recognise — which, in our waking hours, we sometimes long to visit again? Have we not at times, in performing the commonest

actions of life, in opening a book, in shutting a window, in meeting (for the hundredth time perhaps) with a person, experienced a sudden strange unaccountable feeling, which suggests to us, in what appears a supernatural manner, that we have done *that* action, thought *that* thought, met *that* person in the same manner before, and yet the whole impression is independent of the memory, and is more a sensation than a thought? Such was the effect that the first sight of the Campagna of Rome produced upon Leslie; he had lingered at Genoa and at Florence; he had become thoroughly imbued with the order of ideas and of taste which creates in men a sort of new sense and new perceptions. I dwell much upon that change in the whole intellectual being which is caused by a series of impressions and associations which, but a short while before, were as strange to the mind they visit as colours to the born blind, because it partly accounts for the sudden fancy which soon after took possession of Leslie's feelings.

As he was standing one morning on the steps of the church of St. John Lateran, and gazing on the view before him, he exclaimed, half aloud: "This *is* Rome, indeed! I recognise her here!"

A young man, who was sitting on the steps with a drawing before him, heard these words, looked up, and while a bright sudden Italian smile flashed on his dark countenance, without speaking he nodded assent.

This silent gesture made them acquainted, and a few words passed between them. This young man was a painter, and as Leslie glanced at his work he was struck with the extraordinary talent which it evinced. The vague, mysterious, melancholy beauty of the Campagna; the contrast between the brilliancy of its colouring and its utter desolation; was so truly rendered in the hasty sketch before him, that, pointing to it, he said in bad Italian but with a smile:

"And this, also, is Rome!"

"Ah, not more like Rome," exlaimed the young artist, "than the creations of man are like the works of nature! What I can do with *these*," he added, holding up his palette and his brushes, "is so unlike what I see *there*, (pointing to the Campagna), or *here!* (touching his own forehead). It is a great pain to conceive vividly, and to render faintly!"

This was said so earnestly and unaffectedly, that Leslie instantly felt inclined to like and to know more of the young painter. Words sometimes affect us in a singular manner. A phrase, a sentiment which we may often have heard before, at times unaccountably arrests our attention; touches, perhaps, some chord which, by a remote and scarcely perceptible vibration, reaches our own heart, and by a kind of magnetic power instantaneously produces sympathy between us and the speaker. In this case it may have been that the Italian's melancholy and passionate love of his art,

the disproportion which he simply expressed in a few words between the creations of his fancy and the work of his hands, answered to the feelings of one, who like Leslie, under a cold and quiet manner, hid a keen sensibility and a lively imagination. To be a poet in the very depths of his soul, and to find no words in which to give life and form to the thoughts which struggle within him; to feel the might of genius and the strength of inspiration; to be conscious of the fire which consumes him in secret, and to have no mould in which to cast the burning torrent; to feel the sacred flame dying away for lack of air and light to make glad or mournful music in his secret soul, and never hear with his outward ears one note of those mysterious melodies vibrate through the air; to feel that he can love with passion, or thrill with indignation, while his voice is mute, his hands weak, and his eyes dim, is a pain that has, probably, been experienced by many a shy and silent man; one whom the wayfaring man and the fool, the babbler of many words, or the scribbler of many pages, has passed by with indifference or gazed at with contempt; and it is to such as these that one word, one look, comes sometimes with a strange power, and unlocks in an instant the flood-gates which have been closed for years.

The acquaintance which had commenced on the steps of St. John Lateran soon ripened into intimacy. Leslie's fiery and poetic nature, which the quiet round

of domestic duties and interests and the mild light of an early and unthwarted affection had not roused, now sprang into existence, or rather became conscious of its own strength, and in Leonardo Ferrari he found a companion whose character and tastes were at this moment exactly suited to his own. He was an enthusiast and an artist. At once indolent and eager, simple in his character, and impassioned in his language, he was a true Italian. In his romance, there was a nature; in his passion, a simplicity; in his eyes, a fire; and in his manner, a languor which characterises that nation, and seems a type of that country, which one of their poets so mournfully addresses —.

> "Deh, tu fossi men bella, o almen più forte,
> Ond' assai più ti paventasse o assai
> T'amassi men."

For two months Leslie and Leonardo spent such days together as can be spent in Rome alone. Among the ruins of departed glory, scattered as natural ornaments among the fairest and most fantastic scenes that nature ever created; among the relics of a stupendous human power; amidst the memorials of a divine and eternal faith; in the catacombs, those dark palaces of the glorious dead; in the matchless arena, where the blood of martyrs has washed away the foul stains of heathen idolatry, and the image of the Dying Gladiator fades before that of the Saint who yielded his body to the lions, and committed his soul to his God; in the

aisles of St. Peter's, in the galleries of the Vatican, in the gardens of the Villa Doria, they wandered together. Many a lonely church, many a deserted villa, many a silent pine-grove they visited in the twilight hour; and in the day Leslie was often in the studio, where Leonardo worked with that religious devotion to his art, which belonged more to a past than to the present era, and recalled the days when an artist seldom seized a pencil to trace on his canvas the image of our Lord, of his blessed mother, or of the saints, without first kneeling to pour forth his soul in prayer. Leslie learnt Italian, and for the first time read the sublime works in that language, as he sat on the broken marble sarcophagus, which formed the garden-seat of Leonardo's studio. A few flowers grew in that court — a small fountain played in the centre, and two imprisoned birds sung their wild notes over his head. The Italian sun shed its intense light on the walls of the studio, and Leslie's eyes often wandered from his book to the canvas, to which the artist was transplanting one of his mental visions. The subject he had chosen was the resurrection of Jairus's daughter, and into this picture the painter had thrown his whole soul: there was but one figure in it, that of the maiden rising from the bed of death. The expression of her face, her attitude, told the story (if one may so speak) better than if the figures of our Lord, of his apostles, of her parents, and of the scoffers who in that solemn

hour became believers, had been also depicted; and imagination portrayed them more vividly, perhaps, than if the hand of the artist had designed them. The countenance of the little maiden was so holy — there was at once such awe and such serenity in the expression of those large eyes, which an instant before had been closed in death; a vague regret for the vision that was flown — a dawning joy for the life that was regained: on her brow the seal of another world, whose threshold she had passed; on her half-opened lips, a welcome for that to which she was restored; — that as Leslie gazed on this picture day after day, his imagination was more and more captivated by its divine and its earthly beauty. He thought that he had never seen anything so fair in form, or so angelic in expression, as the maiden of Leonardo's design.

One day that he was seated in his favourite retreat and reading the "Jerusalemme," he had just paused after that line which forms the touching conclusion of Clorinda's history, "Passa la bella donna e per che dorma." He fixed his eyes on the strip of deep blue sky which stretched over the narrow court, and mused in silence over the incomparable beauty of that passage. He was startled from his reverie by an exclamation of Leonardo's, who, with folded arms, was contemplating his canvas:

"Not so beautiful—not so holy as *her* face, by one half!" — And he broke his brush into pieces, and

threw the fragments into the court, where they fell at Leslie's feet, who picked them up with a smile at this impassioned manner of venting a moment's discouragement, and inquired who the ideal might be that could throw into shade the creation before them.

"Do you not know?" said Leonardo; "my sister, Ginevra, of course. *That* is her portrait, but it is not really like her. There is more soul in one look of her eyes, more thought in her pensive brow, more love in the expression of her mouth, than ever Raphael or Domenichino painted; and what can I do? Alas! I wish sometimes that I had never seen her, or that she was not so beautiful. It makes me hate my pictures!"

"And break your brushes," observed Leslie, as he collected the pieces; "but I am sorry, Leonardo, that that design of your's is a portrait. I have always disliked that practice of introducing living persons into ideal scenes, especially where the subject is religious."

"But what," cried Leonardo, "what is so religious as Ginevra's face? You have never seen her at her prayers?"

"Never anywhere," replied Leslie, with a smile. "I wish I had."

"I have sometimes gone to the church of San Giovanni, when the rays of the setting sun have been pouring a rich flood of light through the painted windows of the choir, at the hour when she kneels at the altar rail to say her evening prayer. O, Leslie, I have

that Leslie was delighted, and that after a few days spent at Bologna, they crossed the plain of Lombardy in the night, and arrived at Verona early in the morning. The Piazza delle Erbe at Verona, is certainly one of the most enchanting scenes in the world, especially at eight o'clock in the morning, on a sunny day in May. It combines all that the imagination can combine, to make a market-place beautiful to the eye. Think of whatever has charmed you most in the quaint, angular, richly-ornamented architecture of the middle ages — think of forms and projections, of contrasts in colours, which are at once startling and harmonious— think of fountains throwing out of their marble mouths torrents of sparkling water—think of heaps of gigantic carnations and gorgeous hyacinths, such as you seldom see but in Dutch pictures, lying about in wanton profusion, and exhaling odours which might, indeed, make

"The light wings of Zephyr wax faint with perfume."

Think of picturesque groups of dark-eyed women with their white mezzaros and their coral necklaces holding out to you bundles of these flowers. Turn from them and glance down the street which opens on the market-place; fix your eyes on a small wooden balcony — for it is the balcony of the Capulet House and the Capulet crest surmounts the doorway — the form of Juliet rises before you as you gaze, and a *voice in your* ear seems to whisper the very words of *Romeo.*

Then think of the torrents of light, of the golden splendour, which the Italian sun sheds on those fantastic buildings — on those bright waters, on those gorgeous flowers — those dark-eyed women. Think of the busy hum of men, of the rapid glances, of the wild smiles, which give life to that magic scene, of the romantic associations which make your own heart beat at the name of Verona; and then say, whether to arrive there, on that very Piazza delle Erbe, on a delicious morning in May, was not enough to make Leslie exclaim with Italian enthusiasm and English earnestness —

"There is no world without Verona's walls."

Ginevra was more beautiful than Leonardo's design; no canvas has ever borne the semblance of so lovely a creature; no poet's language has ever described the passionate languor of her dark eyes; no sculptor's hand ever moulded a fairer form than hers; the wavering and broken lights that flit on the surface of a stormy sea, are not more varied than the gleams which passed over her face as hope and joy, passion or tenderness, love or scorn, animated her faultless features. When Leslie first beheld her, she was standing under the portico of the villa where Leonardo had preceded him, and holding her brother's hand in hers, she extended the other to him, while she said, in that tongue the very sound of which is music —

"*Oh welcome*, to you who have recalled the bloom

to his cheek, and the light to his eye. He needed sympathy and you gave it. Your's shall be the blessing of those who carry the cup of cold water to the lips of the weary traveller. You will stay with us. Will you not, Leonardo's friend? We have no English comforts," she continued, changing her earnest manner into a playful one, and glancing at the deserted looking building near which they stood, "but our sun and our orange-trees, uncle Francesco's books, and Leonardo's love shall do what they can, and *your* kindness the rest," she added with an increased softness of accent, and a glance from under her dark eyelashes which seemed to ask for something more than kindness; and yet Ginevra was no coquette. She was innocent as the child who crowns her head with flowers, and then laughs in the joy of her heart, as she sees herself in the glass; pure as the swan who curves his white neck as he skims over the water, or the gazelle, who turns her large dark full eye upon you as you pass, for she was as careless of her own beauty as the laughing child, and

"Not the swan on the lake or the deer in the vale"

were more guiltless of a plan or of a design than the niece of Father Francesco, the priest of Rouere, the sister of Leonardo the painter. But her eyes spoke in a way which none but those gazelle-looking eyes can speak; the bright colour in her cheek rose and fell

with bewitching rapidity, as Leslie told her tales of other lands beyond those snowy Alps on which they gazed from the orange-gardens of her home; she learned English, which in her little mouth grew soft as her own skies, and she taught him Italian, which in his became the very language of passion; and when under the shade of an elm-tree they read together the charming romance of Luigi Porta, he thought her the very ideal of the Italian Juliet; — when he surprised her one morning at break of day as she stood leaning against a broken column, and holding her empty basket out to show a clamorous crowd of beggars that her store of provisions had come to an end, he almost wished himself one of those beggars who kissed the hem of her garment, and called her saint and angel. Thus, day by day, in every hour, in every action of her life, in each conversation in which she poured forth the bright and pure thoughts of an ardent but guileless mind, and the high aspirations of an eager spirit, he discerned a goodness and a nobleness which answered to the vision his soul had formed of her whose image had rivetted him in Leonardo's studio: when, in the daily tenor of her life, he saw exemplified that simple type of pure religion, and undefiled, which St. James in a few short words describes: "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep one's self unspotted from the world:" then, to the passion which had sprung up in his heart, was

joined a reverent and intense admiration, which subdued and hallowed its nature; but when, with a strong effort, he once spoke of England and departure, Ginevra turned as white as the marble of Carrara which her brother was chiselling, and when Leslie hastily retracted the words, the pomegranate in her hand was pale by the side of her cheek — all this flashed one day on the kind but stern guardian of the orphan girl. Father Francesco, with severe tenderness, bade her shut her ears to the flatteries and shun the presence of the stranger, who knelt not at the same altar as themselves, and who talked of love and not of marriage to his Ginevra. She obeyed; and Leslie saw the silent struggle of a passion, strong as life, but not stronger than conscience; and he who had watched, followed her, lived in the light of her dark eyes, who had ceased to care for aught on earth but her smiles and her tears, or to fear anything but the loss of the idol he had enshrined in his heart with all the impetuosity of his nature, which had never brooked check or control, — he determined, at all risks, to make her his own.

After a few months, into which were crowded the agitations of a life, during which he had to conquer the opposition of Father Francesco, the scruples of Leonardo, and the objections of his own parents; once, to part from Ginevra when insurmountable difficulties seemed to stand in their way; another time, to rush

back to her side only just in time to prevent her taking the veil; after fears, hopes, anguish, terrors, emotions, and joys, which made this second era in his life as different from the first as a canto of Dante's from a scene of Metastasio, he became the husband of his beautiful Italian bride.

He was again happy for a time, happy, at least, as far as the present moment went. Ginevra was all in all to him; he loved her with that wild idolatry which makes human passion a fearful thing, which seems like the desperate gambler's stake of his whole fortune upon one throw, a garnering up of the soul in one object, a concentration of all the feelings on one sole point. He remained in Italy; he spent a winter at Rome, a summer on the Lake of Como. He could not bear to transplant his beautiful Southern flower into the blighting atmosphere of the North, or expose her to the cold reception which he knew the prejudices of a hostile family could not but procure to her, and it was well that he did not! They *had* their bliss: two years of married love: two years spent among nature's fairest scenes: two years of undivided trust, and daily intense happiness: is not that a great deal of bliss for one man's life? Must not *such* bliss as that decay? Had it not better cease abruptly, than slowly wither?

I am unwilling too early in my story to dwell on scenes of gloom, and this is only a retrospective sketch

of Colonel Leslie's life. He was once more left alone with a child, another girl, two or three years younger than his little English Margaret. One of those sudden and malignant fevers which make such havoc of human life had carried off in a few days Leslie's second wife, and her last words were to entreat him that her child might be placed under the care of her own relations and brought up in her own faith. Leslie religiously complied with this request. This great catastrophe, this second overthrow of the happiness of his life, did a great and sudden work upon him — the work of years. It sobered, perhaps it hardened him. No one exactly knew in what spirit he bore it. He solemnly consigned his children to their respective families, and then he went to Spain and to India. He grew stern in manner; some said, heartless in character — cold he certainly was: none knew him well, and few liked him. He is now returned to his home, and we have seen his first arrival there after ten years' absence. His second marriage, though well known at Grantley, had never been openly talked of or acknowledged among the members of his own and his first wife's family. It had ever been an unpleasant topic, a forbidden subject. When Margaret was a very little girl she had once heard Mrs. Thornton whisper to Mrs. Sydney, after her father had been named, —

"My dear Mrs. Sydney, since that sad Italian affair, I have never been able to feel as if he belonged to us,

or would ever really be at home with us again. I have quite a horror of Italians."

Margaret, who had not the least conception what an Italian was, took an opportunity on the following day of asking her governess what her grandmamma had meant by "that sad Italian affair," and why she had had such "a horror of Italians?"

"Mind your book, and don't ask foolish questions, Miss Margaret," was Mrs. D.'s judicious though not satisfactory answer. When in time Margaret learned more about Italy and Italians, she was still more puzzled, but took every opportunity of talking upon the subject; because, as she observed to one of her little friends:

"When I do so, every body makes a face; grandmamma purses up her mouth, and gazes at the ceiling; Walter frowns and looks at his boots, and grandpapa strokes his chin and begins humming."

"Does he indeed?" asked her companion, who was younger than herself, and who evidently thought these effects must be produced in the same manner as by pulling a string, Punch, Judy and the hangman are set in motion. "And can you really make them do all that only just by talking of Italy? How very odd!"

That it was not very odd we can now understand, and in the following chapter we will resume the story where we left it.

CHAPTER III.

On the day after Colonel Leslie's arrival at Grantley the sun shone brightly as the assembled family met at breakfast with cheerful countenances, and if not all with glad hearts at least with kindly feelings towards each other. It was a hard frost, and the window panes were incrusted with those graceful and fantastic patterns in which we can trace all sorts of fanciful landscapes. The hoar-frost hung lightly on the branches of the trees, and the lawn sparkled with its diamond rays. Margaret sat at the head of the table making tea, the hissing urn before her; her little hands busily managing the old silver teapot, the large coffee cups, and the blue Sèvre cream-jug, and the huge embossed sugar-basin. A cap with pink ribbons was fastened gracefully at the back of her very small head, her large violet eyes seemed to have borrowed their colour from the hyacinth or the iris, and her voice was sweet and clear as the tone of the silver bell by her side. Four pair of eyes in that room were fixed upon her with fond but very different expressions; not to mention those of the family pictures which seemed staring at her also, and those of Ebro and Tagus, the two large dogs, who, with wistful countenances, gazed alternately

upon her and the buttered cakes before her. As she laid her hand on the black head of one, and thrust a large morsel into the open mouth of the other, she said to Walter —

"You are not going home to-day, are you?"

"Indeed I must, and immediately after breakfast, too."

"Why?"

Walter glanced across the table at Colonel Leslie, who was busily engaged with the newspaper. Margaret, who thought that look implied that it was now her father's business and not her's to press him to stay, coloured and said in a low voice —

"I am sure he wishes you to stay; pray do, Walter."

"I cannot, indeed; I am expected at home."

"And for what important business, that you put on so serious a manner?"

"Nothing *very* important. A friend of mine is coming to us, and I must be at Heron Castle to receive him."

"A friend of your's! How curious I shall be to see him!"

"Curious! why curious?"

"Oh, because he must be something very wonderful. I never heard of your having a friend before."

"I am sorry you think me so utterly friendless."

"Oh, not altogether friendless. Grandpapa is your friend, and so am I, and Mr. Killigrew is your friend,

and so is the old clerk, and Mrs. Fellowes, too, in a sort of a way; but I never knew you have a friend before on a formal visit to Heron Castle, a friend who kept you from Grantley, and whom you called in that mysterious manner, without naming him at once, 'a friend of your's!'"

"There is nothing mysterious about him. His name is Edmund Neville."

"The same whose life you saved a few years ago in Ireland?"

"Exactly."

"O then I know all about him, and I am much relieved."

"Why relieved?"

"Because I had fancied that your friend would have been a sort of counterpart of yourself."

"And *two* such you could never have endured?"

"Why, dear Walter, I think you as near perfection as any one can be; but had your friend been exactly like you, you would have lost your originality, and a bad specimen of you I could not have tolerated."

"Well, you may comfort yourself, then, for we are as unlike as possible."

"Is he as grateful to you as he ought to be?"

"I do not see what gratitude he owes me."

"Did you not save his life?"

"I did by him what I would have done by any

human being I had seen in danger of perishing. I see no merit in that."

"Merit!" exclaimed Mrs. Thornton; "no, indeed, my dear Walter, there was no merit in it, except the honour it did to your head and heart; but it is a bad precedent, indeed it is, to risk one's own life —"

"It is a precedent not likely to be too often followed," impatiently interrupted Colonel Leslie. "What is this story, Walter?"

"Let *me* tell it," said Margaret, eagerly.

Walter shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and she went on:

"It was about nine years ago that it happened, when Walter was staying in Ireland, at Mr. Neville's house —"

"My dear," interrupted Mrs. Thornton, "your father does not care at whose house the accident happened."

"I happen to care," quietly remarked Colonel Leslie, "if it is Mr. Neville of Clantoy; I knew him at Oxford."

"It is," said Walter.

"I remember," rejoined Leslie, "that he was one of the fiercest Orangemen in our debating club. I can remember, now, a violent and eloquent speech he made against Catholic Emancipation. He was a prejudiced but a clever fellow —"

"And such he has been ever since," returned Walter, "and where his predilections and his antipathies

do not bias his judgment, he is an excellent and most upright man; but his early impressions never forsook him, and subsequent events seem to have fixed them in his mind with indelible colours. He had made it a rule not to take a Catholic servant into his house, and had always strictly adhered to it; but his gamekeeper, who was one of those old hereditary domestics who succeed to the keeper's office and to his lodge with the same regularity as heirs apparent to their ancestral halls, married a Roman Catholic wife, who had brought up her son in her own faith. Knowing the strong prejudices of his master, he had carefully kept this fact from his knowledge, and as he was himself a regular attendant at the parish church, and Mr. Neville was not in the habit of troubling himself about the families of his servants, he knew nothing whatever of the religious creed of the boy Maxwell, who being in the meantime permitted to become the constant companion of the young heir, and his associate in all field sports and rural amusements, a very strong attachment sprung up between the two youths. One day when they were clambering up trees in the park, John Maxwell broke one of the branches with his weight, and fell heavily to the ground. He was taken up senseless, and it was found that he had suffered a concussion of the brain. After a long confinement, he recovered his bodily, but not his mental health and strength, and exhibited from that time, occasional symptoms of par-

tial derangement. Still, as there was nothing alarming in those symptoms, and the interest of young Neville for his companion was increased by an accident that had befallen him in his service, no interruption of their habits took place. The violence which Maxwell sometimes displayed towards others, was never shown towards Edmund, to whom he always evinced the most devoted affection. Among other pastimes, the boys were accustomed to scamper over the roof of the old castellated house, and one day that they had mounted there together, Maxwell was seized with one of those sudden and irresistible impulses which are the characteristics of insanity, and clasping his companion in his arms, endeavoured to precipitate him over the battlement. At first, Edmund fancied that he was in jest, but when he found the attempt was real, he struggled with all his might, clung to one of the buttresses with the strength of despair —"

"And he was saved?" interrupted Margaret, turning to her father, "saved by Walter's intrepidity and presence of mind. He perceived from below the dreadful struggle, and swinging himself, at the peril of his life, from cornice to cornice, he scaled the outside wall of the turret, and reached the roof in time to rescue the boy from the grasp of the madman, who attacked him in his turn with desperate violence. Was it not so, Walter?"

"It was," he replied. "The scene was short but

dreadful. I cannot think of it to this day without shuddering. The servants soon came to my assistance, and the unfortunate youth was secured. From that moment he became a confirmed maniac, and was placed in confinement. This incident, of course, made a great noise all over the country, and many stories concerning it were invented and circulated by the gossips about the place. Amongst others, it was reported that a Catholic priest had employed Maxwell as an instrument towards young Neville's conversion, and had so worked on his mind by spiritual terrors as to drive him to insanity. Mr. Neville had of course been greatly excited by the occurrence, and those false and absurd rumours were very soon conveyed to his ears. He thus learnt, for the first time, that the constant companion, and very nearly the murderer of his only son, was a Catholic; and though he did not actually credit all the foolish stories which were current in th neighbourhood, his indignation was very great at th deceit which he considered had been practised upc him, and a fresh stimulus was thereby given to tho religious antipathies which were already too strong implanted in his mind, and his hatred of the Cathc religion, and of all who professed it, became m rooted, and assumed a more inveterate character t ever."

"Horrible!" muttered Colonel Leslie.

"Very natural indeed," observed Mrs. Thor

"to hate the man who has almost killed your child I really think it quite wicked not to make allowances for people's feelings. Why, to this day I cannot look with any comfort on a Frenchman, since the French-master gave Eustace the scarlet-fever. He came to him with a face as red, and a throat as sore —"

"Why, my dear," interrupted Mr. Thornton, "you do not suppose, do you, that the man did it on purpose?"

"I suppose nothing, Mr. Thornton. I assert nothing. I do not wish to judge of people's motives; but I only maintain that from that day to this, the idea of contagion has been linked in my mind with the very sight of a Frenchman." And Mrs. Thornton poked the fire with an energy and a conscious freedom from prejudice, that made Leslie and Walter, in spite of themselves, smile as they looked at each other.

Indeed, few things drew a smile from Leslie so readily as some piece of folly or inconsistency in others, and there was something bitterly sarcastic in the curl of his lip and the expression of his half-closed eyes. Even when anything appeared to work on his better feelings, and to inspire him with any degree of admiration or interest, he seemed not to sneer at others for being great and good, but at himself for being moved to appreciate it, and a bitter jest was generally the fruit of a latent emotion. As he

became domesticated at Grantley, and renewed his intimacy with Walter, he could not help respecting his character, and admiring his way of thinking; but unwilling to betray this, he often sought to throw ridicule on his pursuits, if not on himself, in a way which was perfectly indifferent to the object of these attacks, but which tried his daughter's patience severely. Margaret's feelings were warm, and her temper not much under control; her affection for Walter made her peculiarly alive to the least allusion aimed at him in Colonel Leslie's conversation. Sometimes the injured Walter would rouse himself from a fit of abstraction, and observe her cheek flushed and her eyes darting fire at some remark which either had escaped his notice, or in which he had not discovered, or at least not resented, the latent sting. But we must now return to the day which followed Colonel Leslie's arrival at Grantley, and own that our little heroine, deprived of the society of Walter, and left in what was to her an awful *tête-à-tête* with her father, had some trouble to keep up her spirits; and when the two succeeding days also elapsed without bringing with them any change or variety in the shape of a visit from the inhabitants of Heron Castle, an occurrence on which she confidently reckoned, it was with difficulty that she restrained her impatience.

On the fourth day, having been again disappointed, she determined to order her horse, and late in the af-

ternoon to ride to the vicarage, where Mr. and Mrs. Thornton had returned on the same morning that Walter had left Grantley. That vicarage was as pretty a home as can be well imagined, — one of those low-roofed, straggling cottages, to which a room had been added here and an angle there, till the original shape of the building had merged in these successive additions. Creepers and evergreens, and a gleam of sunshine, made it look as gay on that November afternoon as if spring, instead of winter, had been approaching. A few dahlias and chrysanthemums still adorned the beds, and the hollies were already displaying their coral berries. Margaret's spirits rose as she galloped across the park, and drew near to the iron gate which separated it from the grounds of the vicarage-house. And when she came in sight of the house itself, every small-paned window, every smoking chimney, every laurel bush seemed to give her a welcome. The house-dog barked furiously, the gate swung merrily on its hinges, the door-bell rung gaily as she approached, and she jumped off her pony as lightly as if for three whole days she had not been measuring her words, and glancing timidly at Colonel Leslie's face, with the secret conviction that he thought her a fool, or a bore. Her grandfather, who from his study had seen her arrive, came hastily to the door, kissed her cold blooming cheeks, called her his darling child, begged her not to stand in the draught, and led her into the little drawing-

room, where his wife was employed at an endless piece of tapestry work, which had been as often unpicked as Penelope's, though not on as systematic a plan, or with so deliberate a purpose. Margaret tenderly kissed her grandmother, took the well-known work out of her hands, threw her own hat and whip on a couch, settled herself in a low comfortable arm-chair, threaded a needle, and began working as if for her life.

"Grandpapa!" she exclaimed in a moment, "grandpapa, I know now what the poor dogs feel when their muzzles are taken off."

"Do you, darling? How so?"

"*I* have been muzzled for the last four days," she returned with a nod and a smile that made her grandfather stoop down and kiss her forehead, while he said:

"Foolish child!"

"Aye, grandpapa, *you* say 'Foolish child!' and it means, 'Dear, clever, darling girl.' While my father says, when I make a remark, 'Very true, my love,' and *that* means, 'I wish the girl would hold her tongue.' So much for the value of *words*."

"Words, my dear," observed Mrs. Thornton, sententiously, "are only the signs of things."

"True, grandmamma, and certain things had better give no signs of life at all; such as a father's aversion to his child," she added, with a tone of mingled emotion and resentment.

"Nonsense, my love," cried Mr. Thornton, "hov

could anybody have an aversion to you, and still less your own father?"

"There is no accounting for aversions, Mr. Thornton," observed his wife; "I have felt myself the most inexplicable preferences for some people, and dislikes for others. I never could abide the sight of Mary Dickins, Mrs. Sydney's housemaid, or of the young curate who did duty here last Sunday."

"He squints, grandmamma, and Mary Dickins has a crooked mouth and a bottle-nose," cried Margaret, glancing at the opposite looking-glass, which, certainly, reflected an image ill-calculated to inspire aversion.

At that moment the door opened, and two gentlemen came in, the very two for whose appearance Margaret had vainly watched during the last four days. Walter Sydney shook hands with her, and then introduced his companion, young Neville, who, after a slight bow, turned away, and withdrew into a recess behind Mrs. Thornton's embroidery frame. Margaret had been anxious to see Edmund Neville; first, because she had heard of him all her life; and, secondly, because that wish had been thwarted for three whole days. She was somewhat disappointed at his appearance — people we have heard of and thought of much are seldom like what we have expected to see; and though Walter had told her that his friend was not tall, that he was very slight, and that, with the exception of a pair of handsome dark grey eyes, shaded with black eyebrows and

eyelashes, he had not a good feature in his face; she had pictured to herself a very different *héros de roman* from the bóy, as she rather contemptuously termed him in her own mind, who was now sitting opposite to her.

In order to explain why he need have been a *héros de roman* at all, we must unveil a little more of that secret web which is woven in a girl's mind during the time when her future destiny is a mystery to her. Margaret, like —not *all* — but *most* girls, from the time that she had ceased to consider her own marriage as an event that would as naturally and as inevitably occur as having her first gown substituted for a frock, her hair turned up with a comb instead of flowing in ringlets over her neck, or dining at seven with grown-up people instead of at two with her governess, had often revolved in her secret thoughts what was likely to be her destiny in that line. It must be confessed that the idea had often suggested itself to her mind that Mr. Edmund Neville, the friend — almost, like herself, the adopted child of Walter, — the heir to an immense property in Ireland, and, as she had heard, distinguished at Oxford for his remarkable abilities, would be a very desirable husband for the heiress of Grantley Manor. On this notion had been built up many secret imaginings, many vague cogitations respecting his probable merits, his qualities, his looks, and the circumstances that would attend their first meeting. This event had now come to pass, but unattended with any ex-

citing incidents; and what was still more provoking, she did not herself feel in the least excited; but, turning to Walter, she said in a low voice —

"What an unkind man you are, not to have been to see me for three whole days! Account for yourself, Old Walter, or I shall think you the most capricious and inconsiderate of men."

She could not repress a smile as she made this accusation; it was so inconsistent with Walter's character, that she fully expected he would regard it as a jest; but strange to say, he looked a little embarrassed at the charge, and said he had intended to come, but had been twice accidentally prevented just as his horse's head was turned towards Grantley.

"Have you been showing Mr. Neville the beauties of the country?" said Margaret, who was curious to hear her new acquaintance speak.

He turned his head suddenly towards her, the colour rushed into his cheek, the keen glance of his eye rested one instant on her face, and then was rapidly withdrawn. Opening Mrs. Thornton's "Every Lady her Own Knitter," or some such erudite guide to learning, he began reading out to her, in a low voice, directions for the manufacture of a poor man's waistcoat, and then begged to count the stitches in her work, and appeared quite absorbed with this occupation, while Walter was replying to Margaret's question. Not being much accustomed to give up any point,

however trifling, on which her mind was set, she cut this answer rather short, and turning to young Neville, asked him what he thought of the scenery of Brace Muir, the object of their excursion on the preceding day. He gave a slight start when she spoke to him, and answered, without raising his eyes from the rows of knitting which he was counting, "It is very wild, very picturesque." Then in a hurried manner he held out the knitting to Mrs. Thornton, with several stitches in it dropped, and walking up to the flower-stand, he smelt the geraniums and twisted their leaves, with a heightened colour and restless manner.

"It is getting late, my love," cried Mr. Thornton from the lawn in front of the drawing-room; "your pony is impatient, and you had better be off."

"We will accompany you," said Walter, "it will scarcely lengthen our ride, and I should like Neville to see the beeches of Grantley before they have shed all their leafy honours."

"I must go back straight to Heron Castle," cried his friend hastily; "I have a letter to write before the post goes out: but I know the way, so do not think of me."

Margaret was provoked; it was evident that Walter's friend was resolved not to make her acquaintance, and bent on avoiding her society. A slight, almost *imperceptible*, swelling of heart, accompanied this impression. She was not pained, no indeed; nor more

fied either. What was it to her — what did she care whether that ill-mannered boy chose to notice her or not? It was very good-natured of her to have offered to talk to him. She had no wish, now, ever to set her eyes on him again. She was sorry for Walter that his friend was so ungracious and unsatisfactory. She did not wish indeed that Walter had allowed him to be tossed off the battlements of his own castle; but she did wish he had not asked him to Heron Castle to spoil all their comfort. She was just seated in her saddle, and gathering the bridles in her hand, when, turning towards the windows of the dining-room to nod a last adieu to Mrs. Thornton, her eyes met those of Neville, who was standing by her grandmother's side. They were fixed upon her with an intense and piercing earnestness which startled and confused her.

The next moment, long before they had reached the gate of the park, she had made up her mind that Walter had all along had it in his head to bring about a marriage between her and his friend; that he had probably hinted this to him; that this had been very foolish of Walter, for it had put a constraint on their first acquaintance, which would however very soon wear off; and by the time they turned the corner of the avenue, she had begun to examine in her own mind whether Edmund was not rather too short and too slight to be reckoned good-looking; whether she *should, on the* whole, like to marry an Irishman;

whether there was any Irish accent in his way of speaking; and, above all, whether there was likely to be any opportunity of ascertaining this fact. There was no time to be lost in investigating the subject, for with Margaret there was generally little or no interval between the thought in the mind, and the words on the lips. That interval! How it varies with different people! — How much turns upon it! What a rubicon it is — that second, during which the impetuous impulse of the heart, or the rapid conception of the brain, moulds itself into words, and assumes a living shape! — During which, some can deliberately close "the barriers of their teeth," as the Eastern proverb has it, and force back the rising flood, — some, into the polluted dens they call their hearts, — some, into the secret shrines where self is sacrificed and God adored!

What a strange power there is in *silence*. How many resolutions are formed; how many sublime conquests effected during that pause, when the lips are closed, and the soul secretly feels the eye of her Maker upon her. When some of those cutting, sharp, blighting words have been spoken which send the hot indignant blood to the face and head, if those to whom they are addressed keep silence, look on with awe, for a mighty work is going on within them, and the Spirit of Evil, or their Guardian Angel is very near to them in that hour. During that pause they have made a step towards Heaven or towards Hell, and an item

been scored in the book which the day of judgment shall see opened. They are the strong ones of the earth, the mighty for good or for evil, those who know how to keep silence when it is a pain and a grief to them; those who give *time* to their own soul, to wax strong against temptation; or to the powers of wrath, to stamp upon her the mark of their withering passage.

Margaret was not, at this time at least, one of these mighty ones, and the thought that crossed her mind seldom failed to pass her lips, especially when Walter was at her side. She had not therefore been many minutes seated in her saddle before, to use a common expression, she took the bull by the horns, or rather the mane of her companion's horse in her hand, and rolling the rough hair round and round her little finger, she asked —

"How long is Mr. Neville going to stay with you?"

"A few days longer, I believe. How do you like him?"

As she left the Vicarage drawing-room, Margaret would certainly have answered "Not at all," but there had been something in that earnest gaze which she had detected through the clematis creepers of the dining-room window which disposed her to suspend her unfavourable judgment. She thought it accordingly more prudent not to commit herself, and said with a smile,

"Why, in truth, he seems little inclined to give me an opportunity of judging."

"I suppose," said Walter in the same tone, "that he is afraid of you."

"Afraid of me!" cried Margaret, with a burst of her own merry laugh, "I wish that was true! I should like to see somebody afraid of *me!* Why, Walter, I cannot, by dint of frowning and lecturing, make one of the school-children afraid of me. I threatened the other day to turn Martin Dick, the carpenter's fat boy, out of the room, but when he put his thumb to his nose, and spread his fingers out, looking all the time so impudently good-tempered, I laughed outright, and compromised my dignity. What black fingers they were, too!" she added, laughing again at the recollection, while with her own she imitated the attitude of the naughty school-boy, and looked so very pretty, that Walter said, in a half-grumbling tone,

"Some people might be afraid of you, though Martin Dick is not. Afraid of loving you too much, you little witch!"

"More than I deserve, you mean, Old Walter? Well! *you* may be afraid of that; though I should hope your case was a hopeless one; but as to Mr. Neville, *he* can have none of *that* sort of fear."

O Margaret! Margaret! this was the first time in your life that you did not speak the exact truth: for did you not think, even while those words were in

your mouth, that just such a fear as that, would make somebody avoid you in a vicarage drawing-room, and peep at you through branches of clematis? — and did you not begin to revolve in secret why Edmund Neville should be afraid of thinking you too pretty, or making friends with you, when the very worst that could happen to him, would be to fall in love with one of the most captivating heiresses that ever mounted a little spirited Arabian; — and who now, as the wind blew about the brown curls that escaped from under her hat, bent her head low to avoid the spreading arms of the old oaks through which she winded her way; and as she darted out of the grove into the open plain, drew herself up, and shook back those troublesome curls, and reined in her horse, till he arched his neck, and shook back his mane too, and bounded along, as if the hope of conquest, and the pride of beauty, and the schemes of youth, and the visions of joy, and the magic scenes which fancy draws on the blank pages of futurity, were stirring at *his* heart, and flushing before *his* eyes, as well as in those of his mistress?

Ride on Margaret! Ride on while you may, with that bright colour in your cheek, with that smile in your eyes, with that joy at your heart. The blue sky is over your head, and the smooth green turf beneath your feet, and the Spirit of Hope within you is undimmed and strong. Ride on! with Old Walter at

your side, and his voice of kindness in your ear; for the tried affection of early days is a holy thing, and the heart that has loved you in childhood, and the eyes that have gazed on you in infancy, are loving you, and watching over you still. Ride on! and while you urge to his full speed your bounding favourite, and turn your glowing cheek to catch the cold breeze that sweeps across the plain, fear not for the morrow; for the child lies down to sleep by the side of the precipice, and the sea-bird folds his wing on the crest of the wave, and the butterfly dances forth in the sunny days of the spring, and *fear* was not made for the young, for the strong, for the beautiful. Alas! for those who watch! Alas! for those who *fear!* The child wakes, and the chasm is deep! The sea-bird's pinions are weak, and the hurricane is strong! The sunny days of spring wax stormy, and the spring of life is often darkened! Ride on Margaret, ride on while the wintry wind brings colour to your cheek, health to your frame, and joy to your heart!

CHAPTER IV.

As Walter was galloping by Margaret's side along the road which followed the sinuosities of the terrace that overhung the park, the loud report of the keeper's gun which he was discharging in the court behind the house, startled his horse, who, suddenly veering on one side, placed his foot on a loose brick at the foot of the wall, stumbled and fell. For an instant Walter's foot was entangled in the stirrup, and for an instant bore the whole weight of the prostrate animal. When he extricated himself, he became immediately conscious of a severe sprain, and it was only by the assistance of a servant who had hurried down from the house at the sight of the accident that he was enabled to reach the hall door, when he nearly fainted from the intensity of the pain. He was immediately conveyed to his *own* apartment, as a bow-windowed cheerful bed-room, and little adjoining sitting-room, had been for many years always considered; and Margaret, after seeing him laid on a couch, and having summoned Mrs. Ramsay, the housekeeper, to administer such remedies as her skill could suggest, proceeded to her father's library in order to acquaint him with the accident. She knocked at the door, and receiving no answer after two or three

attempts, opened it gently. Colonel Leslie was sitting by the fire, with his face buried in his hands, and Margaret doubted whether he was asleep or deep in thought. It is awkward to wake a person suddenly either from sleep or from abstraction, and she fidgetted about till her father suddenly turned round, and with a loud "Who is there?" in her turn startled her. With a trembling voice she related Walter's accident, and as Colonel Leslie looked at her pale cheek and anxious countenance, his own softened, and passing his arm kindly round her waist, he told her to shôw him the way to Walter's room. When they reached it, Mrs Ramsay's fomentations had begun to take effect, at least it may be supposed so, for Walter received them with a smile, and an assurance that though he could not walk, he did not suffer much. At the same time there was a slight contraction in his forehead, and a nervous movement in his hands that invalidated the truth of the assertion; but Margaret was satisfied with the assurance. Young people (Heaven bless them) are easily comforted, and they jump at anything which relieves them from the irksome necessity of being sorry.

"And if dear Walter's pain will but go," she exclaimed, as she bent over him, and tapped his pillow-cushion to make it comfortable, and threw a pink *barége* shawl over his feet, "it will not be at all unpleasant to have him for once tied by the leg, literally

tied by the leg. Yes, yes, you volatile Old Walter, we have clipped your wings, and now you must stay, '*nolens volens*,' as you used to say. You see I have not forgotten all my Latin."

"Well, if you have not forgotten your English either, I shall get you to write a note to my mother, as you and Leslie seem to think I cannot go home at present."

"Of course not," cried Colonel Leslie; "and, by the way, as that young Neville, who is on a visit to you, is the son of an old friend of mine, and would be no doubt in your father's way during your absence, ask him to come here. He can have plenty of shooting, and hunting too, if he likes it, and I dare say Margaret can amuse him in the evenings."

"Thank you," said Walter, "if it is not inconvenient to you, I should like it."

"Write to Mrs. Sydney, Margaret, and send a groom with the note. He must also call at Dr. Bartlet's on his way. Walter should see him to-night, for I can observe by that restless twitching in the leg that he is still suffering."

Margaret went to the library to write her note. She thought it rather an important one. First, it was necessary to let Mrs. Sydney know of Walter's accident without frightening her; then there was the message about Mr. Neville; very likely he would see this note — and people are very apt to form their judgments of

others from their notes. She would herself feel rather curious to read a note written by Edmund Neville, to see what kind of hand he wrote, and he might just feel the same curiosity about hers. Indeed, had he not been a curious person, he would not have gazed so earnestly on her from behind those clematis branches. In the silver inkstand in the library, there were three pens that had been used before, two black smeared, and one white one. Margaret chose the last. There is a peculiar way in which people set about writing one of these important notes — a note that sets you thinking of the moment when it will be received, and the person who will read it. Generally, like Margaret, they select a new pen; they take just ink enough and not too much, for fear any word should be illegible; a fear that never seems to occur to them in ordinary cases (what a blessing for their correspondents if it did); and then they so carefully weigh the difference between two nearly synonymous words, and it becomes a matter of consequence whether they are their correspondents "very truly," or "very sincerely;" or whether they shall begin with a familiar "Dear," or an impressive "My dear." Then the direction never seems clear or distinct enough; and those long-tried and well-trusted means of conveyance, letter-bags or letter-boxes, mail-coaches or mail-trains, all at once assume an awful character of insecurity, and no sort of confidence is felt that they will perform their part in that particular

instance. Margaret, however, had a simpler process to depend upon for the transmission of her letter than the complicated machinery of the post-office, and having at length satisfied herself as to its composition, she consigned it to the hands of the butler, with an urgent order that a groom should take it instantly to Heron Castle, and wait for an answer, not forgetting to call at Dr. Bartlet's on his way; and then she went up to her own room to meditate a little on the occurrences of the day, and on their probable consequences.

Most people feel the charm or the comfort of *their own room*, — but a young girl's is different from any one else's own room. As we advance in life we close the door behind us to be quiet, to shut out, for a while, the world and its cares; sometimes to muse with grateful hearts on mercies received, or dangers escaped; sometimes to evoke in silence the ghosts of past blessings, and the memories of happier days — if unhappy, on our knees to gain peace, or in dull abstraction find repose — if happy, either to thank God calmly, and set about our daily work cheerfully; or may be, like the rich man in the parable, to bid our souls be at ease, for much good is laid up in store for us; to dwell on the realities of life, to gather strength or apathy against the day of trial, to feel, indeed, sorrow and gladness by turns, for we grieve and we rejoice to the end — but the one has grown calm, and the other hard — the blossom has faded,

and what remains? — a withered husk, or a glorious fruit! But when a young girl enters her own room, and shuts the door behind her, it is the dull realities of life she excludes, and a world of enchantment that she enters — whether with her eyes on the ground, or unconsciously fixed on the broad landscape; the single tree, or the slated roof, which her window-frame spans; or else, while with hurried footsteps she paces up and down the narrow space before her, she acts in spirit, she rehearses in thought, she paints in fancy, the scenes which the veil of futurity still hides from her sight, with a vivid interest and a strength of emotion which life itself seldom yields, and the childish secrets of her solitude are to her the most exciting and the busiest portion of existence. Very busy was Margaret in that line; and while her maid placed one camellia in her hair, and then another, she thought till her head almost ached of the probable consequences of the invitation that had just been despatched.

Luckily for her Mrs. Dalton walked in just then with a nosegay of hot-house flowers, provided every day for her by the old gardener; and still more luckily, after expatiating a little on Walter's accident, she asked the very question Margaret wished to be asked. Rare luck for Mrs. Dalton, whose questions were not often so acceptable!

"Well, my dear, have you seen young Mr. Neville?"

"Yes! Have you, Mrs. Dalton?"

"Indeed I have, my dear; and had some conversation with him too."

"Where? When? How could you have met him?"

"Why, the fact is, my dear, I wanted a Colchicum Autumnale to complete the collection of Melanthaceæ which Miss Flummer describes in the fifth chapter of her little work, 'Botany made easy.' It is six weeks since we read that chapter together, dear: you know you do not take much to botany, but yet I never saw you so pleased before with any work upon it, as with those first chapters of 'Botany made easy.'"

Here Margaret gave a sudden jerk, which was not calculated to make her maid consider her task as "Hair-dressing made easy."

"Yes, yes, it is a very nice little book, bud did you find —"

"Yes, my dear, a very fine specimen, indeed; but not exactly the same as Miss Flummer —"

"O, do leave Miss Flummer alone; I hate the very sound of her name. Was it in the garden you met?"

"No, dear, in the churchyard; it grows under the old elm."

"O, the plant, yes! but I meant Mr. Neville."

"I beg your pardon, my dear. Yes it was in the churchyard I saw him."

"What could he be doing there?"

"He was looking at the inscriptions on some of the tombs. Just as I passed him, my tin box fell out of my hand; he very civilly picked it up, and, as I was thanking him, he asked me to point out to him the monuments of the Leslie family, and as I showed him where they stood, he inquired if I was a member of your family; and on hearing I was, or rather had been, your governess —"

"Never mind, dear Dally," interrupted Margaret, laying her hand on the old lady's arm, "you never governed at all, so you shall be called governess as long as you please, even when I am a very old maid; but go on; never mind the dressing-bell, you need not make yourself smart. So Mr. Neville found out you were my governess! And how did you find out who *he* was?"

"As I left the lodge, I had seen him ride along the fish-pond, and old James told me he was the youngster, as he called him, that was staying at Heron Castle."

"Now, tell me; what did he ask about *me?*"

"How old you were."

"Humph! What was that to him, I wonder! And what else?"

"He said, 'Was it not true that Miss Leslie had a charming disposition?'"

"*Now, I* should like to know what you said in *answer to that*, Mrs. Dalton. Take care; you told

me two days ago that I was the idlest, the vainest, and the most provoking young lady you had ever met with: yes, worse a great deal than Mrs. Atkin's seven daughters, or Sir Charles Butcher's nine — so now I hope you did not go and humbug poor Mr. Neville about me."

"I said, Miss Margaret, that I was not in the habit of talking over the characters of my pupils, with strangers especially; this I said with a bow and a smile, so as to show the young gentleman I was not offended, and on other subjects had no objection to talk to him."

"Well done, Dally! No doubt he supposes I am a little vixen, of whom you can say no good, and therefore that in charity you hold your tongue about me. How ill-natured of you not to say that I was a little angel. It is what everybody expects of their governess, though they may have been little devils all their lives. I wish anybody would only ask me what sort of governess you were. I should look mysterious, and sigh, and refuse to speak, as if you had bullied me within an inch of my life for the last fifteen years."

"For shame, Miss Leslie," said Dally, trying to look grave, but giving, in spite of herself, a grim smile.

"And now," cried Margaret, forcibly detaining the

retiring Mrs. Dalton, "and now, what else did you talk about?"

"The country, and the garden, and the neighbours, and Mr. Walter Sydney."

"O, he spoke of Walter, did he? As he ought, I hope?"

"He said he loved him as if he did not fear him, and feared him as if he did not love him."

"Did he really? How very well expressed; but it was odd to say that to you, a perfect stranger."

"Not quite a stranger."

"Why? How? What do you mean?"

"The dinner-bell!" cried the horrified Mrs. Dalton, as the vision of keeping the Colonel waiting presented itself to her affrighted eyes, while the gong resounded in her ears.

"O never mind," cried Margaret, answering the thought, not the words. "Put on the lavender cap and the lace tippet, and you will be ready in a minute; but Dally, mind," she continued, following Mrs. Dalton down the passage, "that you make haste at dessert with those eternal chesnuts you are so fond of, for I shall nod and come away *very* soon. I am so very curious."

Colonel Leslie was that day more conversible than usual at dinner, and while he was giving an animated account of some incidents in the Peninsular War, Margaret *forgot* her impatience to leave the dining-room, *and her* eyes flashed with such excitement, that her

father said, with a smile, "I believe you would like to lead a forlorn hope yourself, you look so very heroic at this moment."

As I once said before, Colonel Leslie's smiles were sneers, and the sudden way in which he had checked her enthusiasm struck coldly on his daughter's heart. She bit her lips, looked attentively at the birds on her Dresden china plate, and after a pause Mrs. Dalton and herself hurried to the drawing-room. Margaret stood before the blazing fire, and twisting an allumette in her hand, said, aloud, but to herself, "O no, I could not lead a forlorn hope!"

"The Colonel did not really mean you could, my dear," observed Mrs. Dalton.

"I cannot understand the courage of despair. I could do great things if I had strong hopes of success; but forlorn hopes, desperate struggles — O no, it tires me to think of them."

"Then don't think of them, dear child. Won't you have some coffee?"

"Could *you* lead a forlorn hope, Dally?"

"I hope I could."

"What *can* make you feel as if *you* could, when I feel *I* could not?"

"Why, you know, if I were a soldier, it *might* be my duty."

"What a *cold* word *duty* is. I could not do right *things merely* because it were my duty."

"That is, perhaps, the reason, my dear, why you seldom do right things."

"Perhaps it is," said Margaret, slowly, "I know it would be right to try, but it is *such* a forlorn hope," she added, half sadly, half gaily.

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"To make my father love me," was the answer.

This was a theme on which Mrs. Dalton never suffered Margaret to proceed. She had that intimate persuasion that what *ought* to be, should never be supposed *not* to be, that the most distant admission of the sort, seemed, in her eyes, almost as shocking as the fact itself, and she desired Margaret, in a much more authoritative manner than usual, not to talk such wicked nonsense. At this opportune moment the door opened, and a servant brought a note which Margaret took with great eagerness, and which seemed to turn her thoughts into quite another channel, for she had scarcely read it when she exclaimed —

"Oh! by the way, how came Mr. Neville not to be altogether a stranger to you?"

"Don't you know, my dear, that I lived some years in Mr. Warren's family. Mrs. Warren was young Mr. Neville's aunt, and when he was a very little boy he was once for some weeks entrusted to my care. I reminded him of this, and he perfectly recollected it, and named several little incidents that had occurred during that visit."

"Was he a nice little boy?"

"Very spoilt, indeed, he was, and so wilful. He led one a weary life!"

Margaret laughed and said,

"He is coming here to-morrow. I hope he will not torment us much."

"O, not now, Miss Margaret, he is too old for that."

"Well, we shall see," cried Margaret, springing from her chair, with a bound that carried her in one second to the door, "perhaps people are never too old for that;" and as she rushed up the stairs to the landing-place, and then down those which led to Walter's room, jumping two at a time, and singing out in different keys and with various roulades, these words:— "Two can play at that game," — what was she thinking of? Of the dexterous activity with which she cleared those intervening steps? Of the cup and ball which she snatched up from the table, and managed with the most graceful skill? Or of the shuttlecock which by one little mischievous knock she sent flying across the lofty hall? No; I am afraid it meant, "If he means to plague me, I may perhaps plague him first!" For shame, Margaret! you did not deserve as you entered Walter's room, and asked him kindly how he did, and fetched a cushion for his head, and sat down by the side of his couch to read to him his mother's note, that he should take your hand and kiss

it, and that he should call you the very best little woman in the whole world. You were not a bad one; no, perhaps a tolerably good one, as women go; but certainly not the very best, or anything like it. If he had said the very prettiest we might have let it pass.

The next day it was ascertained that Walter had sprained his leg so severely that it would be quite impossible for him to put his foot to the ground for a week or ten days, at least, and Dr. Bartlet recommended that even then he should not attempt much exertion, but suffer himself to be nursed and treated as an invalid for some time to come. Margaret heard this decision with considerable satisfaction, and spent an hour in pulling about the furniture in his room, and bringing within his reach everything he could possibly want during what she called his imprisonment.

"Hard labour," she said, "in the House of Correction; which means, dear Walter, that you are to labour hard for a month to correct my faults."

"You must confess them before I can correct them," answered Walter, with a smile. Margaret looked a *little* graver than usual, and folded her arms, as she stood at the end of the couch exactly opposite Walter.

"I could not bear you to think ill of me," she said at last; and after a pause added, with a forced laugh, "and shall not, therefore, choose you for my confessor."

An hour afterwards, after entangling further some very entangled knitting, with a desperate pull, which served to bring matters to a crisis, she asked —

"Walter, do you think it a great fault to wish *passionately* to be liked, praised, and loved?"

"No; not a great fault in itself, but a dangerous taste, and if it grows into a passion, not seldom a fatal one."

After a pause, seeing that she remained silent, he continued —

"But is it *all* praise you care about? Is it the affection of anyone or everyone that you covet?"

"Not alike," she replied; "but none comes amiss. I like the house-dog to wag his tail at my approach. Cousin Mary's baby to throw his arms round my neck when I kiss him. I like kind, loving faces about me; and I hate a cold, stern look, as I do a dark and gloomy day. I wish to be loved, as I wish the sun to shine upon me. As a sunless world, so would a loveless life be to me! Walter, can you fancy a more unhappy being than one whom nobody loved?"

"Yes; one who loved no one."

"Would that be worse, do you think? Can love be its own reward?"

Walter opened a volume that was lying by his side, and read out loud the following beautiful passage from one of Scott's novels: —

"Her thoughts were detached from the world, and only visited it, with an interest like that which guardian-spirits take for their charge, in behalf of those with whom she lived in love, or of the poor whom she could serve and comfort —"

"That is like *you*," said Margaret, as he closed the book; "and that is the sort of love you would feel for others. I shall never be so unselfish."

At that moment her eyes were fixed on the window, and a smile hovered on her lips as the sound of horses' feet on the pavement of the inner court announced an arrival. She rose hastily, but before she had made her escape through one door the other was flung open, and Edmund Neville made his appearance. Without being really handsome, he had some of the picturesque qualities of beauty. The deep colour in his cheek, and the earnest expression of his eyes, as he advanced towards Walter, and anxiously inquired if he was still suffering from his accident, gave him favour in Margaret's eyes. He turned quickly towards her, and held out his hand as to an old acquaintance; his manner quite changed from that of the day before. When she moved to go away, he took her by surprise, by saying, with a kind of childish but arbitrary earnestness, "Don't go away."

Now, considering that she had not the least wish to go, it would have been ill-natured not to stay; and

with a smile that said as much, she took a middle course, neither leaving the room, nor returning to her chair by the fire; but half leaning, half sitting, on the back of Walter's couch, she set about rubbing, with the corner of her embroidered pocket-handkerchief, a certain ink spot which disfigured the brightest peony on the chintz cover of the said sofa. That this notable employment could not come to a natural end (seeing that no rubbing has ever been known to take out ink-spots), was rather an advantage than not, under the circumstances; and it was not till the luncheon-bell rang, and Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, who were always invited to come to Grantley when any stranger was there, had made their appearance in the dining-room, that Margaret, for the third time, advanced towards the door, and this time was not checked in her progress, but glided down the oak-staircase with Edmund Neville by her side. Mr. Thornton, who was already seated before an immense game-pie, and with the wing of a partridge on his uplifted fork, and a broad smile on his radiant countenance, exclaimed, as she entered the room —

"How now, my darling; what makes you look so very bright to-day? Muzzle off, eh?"

She made a sign with her pretty head as if slipping it out of a collar, and drawing down the suspended pinion to her own plate with a little gentle violence, she laughed gaily at her own exploit; boasted of having

her own way in everything, and managing everybody by hook or by crook; and lastly, in an undertone, with a significant little nod, she said to Mrs. Dalton,

"And after all, Dally, I think I could lead a forlorn hope."

Three weeks had elapsed since Walter's accident, and to Margaret they had been some of the pleasantest she had ever known. She lived in a moral atmosphere, which to her was both natural and genial — that of praise and affection. Her grandfather and grandmother, and Mr. and Mrs. Sydney, who had come to Grantley to be near their son, all idolised her. She had grown up among them — under their eyes — on their knees. Her voice — her laugh — had been the sunshine of their lives for the last seventeen years. *Margaret's room*, whether it were the tapestried bed-chamber at Heron Castle, where Walter had so often lifted her up as a baby, to look at the strange figures on the wall; where he had told her stories about the fierce Count Bertram and the gentle Lady Godiva; where she had shook her little fists at Queen Eleanor, the cruel dame in the red hood, and cried for fair Rosamond, the damsel in the green mantle; or whether it was the chintz bed-room at the Parsonage, whose sash-window opened on the smoothest lawn and the gaudiest flower-beds that ever adorned one of those pretty English

homes — *Margaret's room* was *the* room in the house.

"My singing-bird is gone, Walter," Mrs. Sydney was wont to say to her son; "but I like to look at the empty cage, and think she will come back to it." Her pale, quiet Walter pressed her hand upon this; but latterly he had often replied, "You know, dearest mother, we cannot now hope to keep her often to ourselves." And then his fond, unwise, foolish mother would answer, "And why should we not keep her, some day, all to ourselves?" The colour would deepen on Walter's sallow cheek; and he would frown when his mother said this, but he did not, I fancy, love her the less for it.

When Margaret left the Parsonage, Mr. Thornton repeated, ten times a day, "What a plague it is that the child must go! What nonsense it is that she must go home at all!" And though Mrs. Thornton repeatedly assured him that it was not in the nature of things that people should always stay in the same place, and that she would rather see Margaret dead at her feet and buried in the churchyard than shut up for life in a poky house like their's; or, at other times, ask with a mild significant placidity, "What 's the girl to us, or we to the girl, that she should never leave us?" — still she, too, pined for the return of the "bonny lass," (as the old Scotch gardener called her), and twenty times a day she looked up from her

work (that everlasting white cat on a blue ground) to see whether the green gate was not swinging on its hinges to admit the old black pony, who had, for so many years, carried the little lady of the manor through the copse woods, the shady avenues, and the grassy glades of the fair valley of Grantley. All went well with Margaret during that dull month of November. Everybody smiled on her, and every eye that rested upon her gladdened as it gazed. Walter, her "dear Old Walter," she was sure must be very happy in his own favourite room, with his gentle mother to nurse him, and her, his own little Margaret, to read to him, to sing to him, to fetch for him from the library those heavy dull wise books he was so fond of, and to carry his messages about the country, and convey to many a cottage, and many a sick-bed, the comforts he was wont to bestow day by day on those who stood in need of them. Whether the bright vision that passed before these sufferers' eyes, even though it left behind it substantial tokens of its presence, soothed their sorrows as much as the kind pressure of Walter's hand and the whispered words of support and of hope beyond what this world can give, that they were wont to receive from him, is doubtful; but she did her best, that fair and happy child of prosperity, and it was not *her fault* if a bitter experience had not yet taught her *those* secrets of the heart by which we find our way *to the* hearts of others. Yea, and the poor b

her, and Walter praised her, and his mother worshipped her, and all spoiled her. Was that not enough to make her happy? Was it strange that her eyes grew brighter every day, her step lighter, and her laugh more joyous than ever?

CHAPTER V.

One morning that Margaret was at work in the drawing-room, and Mrs. Thornton was sorting worsteds at her side, Edmund Neville, whose eyes had been fixed upon some shades of grey as intently as if he, too, was about to shade the tail of a white cat, suddenly jumped up, and now rivetted his eyes on the entrance court, where Colonel Leslie was about to mount his horse.

"Where is your father going so early?" he asked of Margaret.

"To Lord Donnington's," she replied; "his place is fifteen miles off."

Having lost sight of Colonel Leslie, who at a rapid pace had galloped down the avenue, Edmund now turned again to Margaret, and with a manner that was peculiar to himself, and which was at once as coaxing as a child's, and as despotic as a young autocrat's, said, looking earnestly into her face —

"I want to see the house. Come and show me *all* the house."

"The kitchen and the cellars, I suppose?" asked Margaret, with a smile; "for you have seen all the rest."

"No, indeed, I have not examined the pictures in the dining-room; and I have never been into the inner library, nor into your father's study. Come with me."

"What an odd fancy," persisted Margaret.

"Not at all an odd fancy, my love," observed Mrs. Thornton; and, phrenologically speaking, I can perfectly account for it."

Margaret who knew that her grandmother had been studying Combe during the last two days, instinctively wished to escape the threatened solution, and another impatient "Come" from Edmund was more effectual than the last, and both had reached the bottom of the stairs before Mrs. Thornton had recollected the exact phrenological bump by which she had intended to account for Mr. Neville's wish to see the house.

To describe Edmund Neville (not phrenologically, but in common plain language) is what must now be attempted, although it is a matter of some difficulty to find the exact terms in which to do so. He was rather short and very slight, but yet his muscular and perfectly symmetrical figure conveyed a notion of remarkable activity and strength. His head was small and particularly well set on his shoulders; there was that singularly grave and refined manliness about his attitudes which brings to mind the portraits of Vandyke. His hair was very dark but not black, and his complexion at once pale and healthy. His eyes were very

fine, but it would not have been easy to define their expression; eagerness was their chief characteristic, and this peculiarity contrasted strangely with the general languor and carelessness of his manner. His eyes were fine, they seemed to read into your soul, but they did not allow you to read into his. His manner combined a winning childlike ease with a more than ordinary self-possession. His lips were thin, and the lines round his well-formed mouth indicated a fixity of purpose, scarcely consisting with the apparent indolence of his character. It was like his hand which, soft and white as it was, had the strength of a steel spring, and could break at once a bough which Colonel Leslie and Mr. Thornton had vainly attempted to bend. In the smallest occurrences of life he practised a strength of volition which it was very difficult to withstand. He obliged Mrs. Thornton to ground her cat in red instead of blue, Mrs. Dalton to give the village children an extra holiday, Margaret to wear heath instead of ivy in her hair, Walter to read out loud a pamphlet on the Corn-laws instead of an essay on Ecclesiology, and he was even known to carry a point with old Mr. Sydney about his plantation: a certain bank was planted with beeches instead of firs at his suggestion, although in the first instance the lord of Heron Castle had treated the proposal with unqualified contempt. There was something nearly irresistible in the childlike earnestness with which he pursued his

object; there was something so *caressant* (no English word will do here) in his way of urging it: if the subject was a trifle it seemed so ill-natured to oppose him; if it was of consequence his whole heart seemed so set upon it; and thus he made his way, and had his way with every one, and every one liked him even better than they owned; and though Colonel Leslie sneered at the way in which others spoiled "that young Neville," he too was always glad to see him, would turn out of his way to join him in his walks, and he put off a party which had long been projected to St. Wulstan's Abbey, because Edmund, poor fellow, had a head-ache and could not go with them.

Margaret and Edmund were now examining the pictures in the dining-room with an interest that seemed equal on both sides, for she loved them almost as the companions of her childhood, as the subjects of her day-dreams in later years, as the familiar images which had wound themselves into all the memories of the past. He seemed to enjoy them as one who could appreciate their merit as an artist, and he listened with interest to the family histories that were attached to some of them. They stopped some time before a portrait of Colonel Leslie which had been painted for Margaret's mother, just before her marriage. It seemed to rivet Edmund's attention; he gazed on it as if his eyes would never take themselves off it; Margaret spoke to him twice without rousing him, and when for

the third time she asked him if he thought it like, he slowly answered "Very like" and still gazed on with undiminished attention. At last he turned away and said abruptly,

"How old is your father?"

"About forty-two, I believe," she replied.

"And you?" said Edmund, with a smile.

"Not *very* far from nineteen," she answered.

"And your sister?" he continued.

Margaret started; turned her large violet-coloured eyes full upon him, with a troubled and enquiring expression. It had been a dream of her childhood that she had a sister; she had a vague recollection of having once heard her grandmother say to her governess, when they thought her out of hearing, "Only think of that little Italian papist being *her* sister!" With that strange reserve which exists so often even in the most open-hearted and guileless children, she had kept this in her mind, and pondered over it, without ever speaking about it to any one, till by degrees the impression faded away, and was lost among the busy thoughts of daily life. As time went on, it seemed so unnatural that if she indeed had a sister, no one should name or allude to her, that she came to reckon this remembrance among the wild fancies which in hours of solitude so often take a form in the musings of childhood. *Edmund's* question seemed, as by an electric shock, to

wake a train of thought in her mind, and her heart beat very fast as she answered,

"Years ago I once imagined that I had a sister somewhere abroad, but as no one ever mentioned her to me, I have ceased to think it possible. What then do you know of any sister of mine?"

"I was told you had one," he carelessly replied; "but I dare say I make some mistake; now show me the copy of Guido's Speranza, which you spoke of the other day."

Margaret opened the door of Colonel Leslie's study, and led the way to the picture, but her heart was full; and turning suddenly back, she said to Edmund in an earnest manner,

"Will you please to tell me, Mr. Neville, when and where you heard that I had a sister? It would be such —"

She stopped short, and turned abruptly aside.

"Such what?" cried Edmund eagerly.

"Such happiness!" she exclaimed, with a passionate burst of tears. "I want a sister;" she continued, with great excitement. "They are all so good, so kind, so wise, those who love me, those I love; and Walter — dear Walter — I love him with all my heart; but they are too good, too wise, too patient with me. I want a sister to talk to, to laugh with, to quarrel with" — and she smiled through her tears.

Edmund seized her hand, and kissed it.

"Margaret! dear Margaret!" he began, "I have something to say to you; — something which day after day I have been longing to say to you. Will you listen to me now? Will you hear me, dearest Margaret?"

"No, no!" cried Margaret, starting up from her chair, while a crimson blush spread over her brow, her cheeks, her neck. "I never intended this — you have quite misunderstood me — I never meant —"

At that moment the house-door bell rang furiously; an instant afterwards, Colonel Leslie's step was heard on the stairs, and before the doors of the study were flung open, Margaret had disappeared through the garden entrance.

Edmund, with the most perfect self-possession, apologised for having invaded the study, and in the most leisurely manner returned to the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Thornton's attention divided between the shading of pussy's tail, and explaining to Mr. Sydney the absolute necessity of investigating the bumps of children at the earliest period of their existence. Indeed, her feelings on the subject were so strong, that were she to have another child, she had much rather it was born without a head at all, than deprived of certain bumps which she deemed it incumbent on babies to possess.

We must follow Margaret to her own room, where she had rushed with the consciousness that something important had taken place, but without a clear idea of

what had occurred during the last few minutes. Her hands were joined together and her head rested upon them. She thought of the first earnest gaze of those piercing eyes which had since been so often fixed upon her's with an expression of intense interest, which haunted her by day and by night. She thought of the childish pleasure with which she had looked to Edmund's visit — of the childish exultation with which she had seen him follow her, seek her, watch her; and now something serious had come over the spirit of this dream. It seemed as if a spring had been touched which opened to her a new world. Was it the world of fancy or the world of realities that she was now entering upon? Had she been dreaming hitherto, and was she now awaking, or was it a new and strange dream that was taking possession of her?

She felt afraid — it was only a little nervousness — she lifted up her head, and turned her flushed cheek towards the window. She looked on the lovely landscape below, the broad glad river, and the purple hills beyond; a little bird was fluttering wildly near the window. It seemed stunned at last, and lying on its back, gazed upward in silent terror. A hawk was hovering over it. Margaret watched it with intense interest, and when the bird of prey pounced on its victim, she gave a slight scream and shut her eyes. When she opened them again, two or three bright

feathers, stained with blood, were lying on the gravel walk.

"Poor bird, poor little bird!" she said in a low tone, and her voice trembled.

"What nonsense is this? What is the matter with me?" she impatiently exclaimed, after a moment's interval, and drawing a deep breath, she shook off that strange oppression. A wild fit of gaiety succeeded it. She sat down at the piano-forte, and her fingers ran over the keys with triumphant rapidity. She threw open the window, and snatching a branch of laurel from the tree beneath it, she threw the shining leaves into the fire, and smiled to herself as the bright flame rose and the sound of a mimic artillery burst from them, such as had often amused her childhood. She moved from chair to chair, from window to window, opened every book on the table, and then threw herself into her low arm-chair before the fire, and gave herself up to a fit of musing, in which was acted and re-acted in fancy the short but important scene which had occurred in the study. Her cheeks again turned crimson as she thought that by her own unguarded expressions she had perhaps drawn from Edmund Neville an avowal of his feelings; she had checked that avowal in time to save her own self-respect, but would he ever ask her again to listen to him; or would he take her at her word, and *never* woo her more? O no, her eyes, — and she looked up in the glass at those

large dark mischievous blue eyes, — would soon bring him back to her feet; and she glanced at the fender on which the smallest feet in the world were resting; and the smile which played on her lips and which dimpled on her cheek would have been enough to bring back the most restive admirer from one end of the world to the other. "And luckily," thought Margaret, and the smile turned into a laugh, "he is not yet at the other end of the world, and if he ever gets there, or away from Grantley, without asking to be heard again, my name is not Margaret Leslie, and I am not my father's daughter." And the spoilt little beauty left her room with as determined a step and resolute a countenance as if about to scale the walls of Badajos or the ramparts of Burgos.

When Margaret entered the drawing-room, she found that Walter, for the first time, with the aid of a stick, had managed to reach it, and was established in a recess between the window and one of the huge fire-places of that old-fashioned apartment. She held out her hand to him and said gaily: —

"You must not get *too* active, Walter. I am half angry at seeing you out of your room. You will be taking flight to Heron Castle if we do not take care."

Walter kindly pressed her offered hand, but did not reply in the same gay tone as herself. He asked if she had seen her father since his return.

"No," said Margaret, and at that moment she re-

membered that instead of spending the whole day out as he had intended, Colonel Leslie had come home after an hour's absence.

"Do you know why he did not go to Lord Donnington's?" she asked.

"I fancy he met the postman between this and Herrington, and that taking his letters from him he found one that made him turn back. At least he said something to that effect as he crossed the hall to his study."

The mention of the study recalled to Margaret's mind the whole train of thought which had previously occupied her, and when an instant afterwards Walter put to her the same question he had done once before, three weeks ago, and in much the same tone and manner asked, "How do you like Edmund Neville?" it seemed as if he had read into her thoughts. She gave a slight start, and would have given anything to keep down the colour that she felt fast rising into her cheeks; but as that was impossible, she turned away and stood with her back to Walter, while she answered in a hurried manner.

"I like him very much. Don't you?"

Walter did not answer.

"Don't you?" repeated Margaret, and this time she looked him full in the face.

"No;" was after a pause of a few seconds, his deliberate answer.

"No! And why not?" exclaimed Margaret, i

one of so much disappointment, that it could not fail o excite his observation. A cloud passed over his face, nd he was again silent. Margaret impatiently repeated er question; but she, in her turn, was struck with he suffering expression of his countenance, and sitting lown gently by his side, she took his hand in her's, nd in quite another tone, for the third time, asked —

"And why do you not like Edmund Neville?"

"Perhaps I am unjust," Walter said with an effort. 'I may wrong him, but I cannot feel any confidence n him. I do not feel as if the truth was in him."

"Has he ever deceived you? Has he told you what vas not true?"

"No; I cannot say he has; but he has none of that alue for truth, that deep respect for it, which he must ave in whose character I could place implicit confi- ence."

"This is a very vague charge," returned Margaret, n a tone of annoyance, "and hardly consistent with hat charity which thinketh no evil, and which you are lways inculcating upon me."

Walter coloured deeply, and leant his head on his and, while she continued —

"You, who were once so fond of Edmund! You, vho considered him, as you often told me, almost as our son! It must be some very strong proof of his nworthiness that can induce you to set his friends gainst him."

"His friends!" said Walter, with emotion. "Is friendship then the growth of three weeks' standing? Are you the friend of a man whom three weeks ago you had never seen?"

"I made acquaintance with him under a false impression! I fancied he had been *your* friend; I am now undeceived; but I cannot follow you in your rapid changes of opinion, especially when you cannot account for them."

"You are severe, Margaret, but perhaps just. God forgive me if I have wronged Edmund; if I have misjudged him! I spoke hastily, and — but what do I see? — tears in your eyes, my child? Speak to me, dearest. Do not turn away from me. — I can bear anything but that. Tell me, Margaret, and forgive me for asking the question — as an old friend — almost a father —"

"Oh! if you were my father," she exclaimed, clasping her hands together, "I would open my whole heart to you!"

"Do so now, Margaret. You will never repent of it. Trust to the assurance of one who has never deceived you, my dear child. Eighteen years ago, I stood by your cradle by the side of your mother, and loved you *then* for that mother's sake. Can you not now trust me with your little secrets — your little sorrows, if you have any."

"Sorrows, Walter? — Secrets?"

"Yes, a secret, perhaps; but hardly a sorrow, at least ten minutes ago it was not a sorrow."

She sat down at the pianoforte, first played the notes, and then, in a low voice, sang the words of a little French song, which ended thus —

"Mon secret, mon secret, mon bonheur,
Il est là, il est là, dans mon cœur!"

She fixed her eyes on Walter as she finished her song, and their expression reminded him of those eyes which, in the days of his boyhood and early youth, he had so often gazed at from that very spot, and in the silence of his heart he promised his Mary in heaven, that he would watch over her child, and guide her on her dangerous way with as firm a hand, and as steady an eye as if he too was beyond the reach of human fears, hopes, and passions. It was a sacred vow, the fruit of one of those emotions which sink into the heart, until they deepen into action. Margaret turned over the leaves of her music-book, and then shutting it again suddenly, she looked up with gentle and earnest countenance; her voice trembled slightly, as she said —

"I will tell you the exact truth, Walter. I like Edmund Neville, — how much or how little I scarcely know myself. It is a strange thing to me to like a new acquaintance, a person of my own age, and one so unlike those whom I have hitherto so dearly loved — I cannot tell you how dearly, Walter;" — tears again rushed into her eyes, but she restrained them,

and they only trembled on her dark eyelashes — "and now that I think he likes me; that he has all but told me so; I am afraid of him, of myself, and of you, Walter," she added, with increasing emotion, "for I see that my folly makes you unhappy. If it be so, Walter — if you really think ill of him — if, indeed, as you said just now, the truth is not in him, I will give up 'mon premier secret, mon dernier bonheur!'"

Walter rose and came to her side; his voice was perfectly calm, as he slowly and emphatically said —

"My dear child, I spoke without sufficient grounds when I accused Edmund Neville; I have no right to advance such a charge against him, and if you have seen that in him which has touched your heart, I dare not judge him! — I dare not trust my own aching fears — and yet — Margaret, my own dear child, beware! — Forget what I have said — think not of me, of my over-intense solicitude — but watch him — watch yourself — trifle not with a treasure of priceless worth — give it not rashly away — pause — and pray. I can say no more."

Margaret gave her hand to Walter who pressed it earnestly to his lips; both rose together and stood at the window, gazing at the black heavy clouds which were careering wildly across the sky, driven along by the same stormy gusts of wind that swept away before them the last lingering leaves of autumn. They did *not speak; both* their hearts were full, and both stood

when the voice of Colonel Leslie disturbed their reverie; he was standing at the door of the library, and his manner, if possible, still more stern and formal than usual, when he said to Margaret who had turned round and advanced to meet him,

"Will you be so good as to come for a moment to my room?"

She called one of the Newfoundland dogs that was lying on the rug, whispered to Walter as she passed him, "Look at Ebro's tail. I am sure it goes between his legs out of sympathy;" bent down a minute to stroke the old dog, and entered her father's room, to which she had never been invited before in that formal manner, or, indeed, in any manner at all.

Their relative positions had assumed an unfortunate character from the first moment of his return to England. On her arrival in London, her warm and impetuous feelings had been chilled by his cold reception, and unaccustomed to conceal her impressions, the reaction of his manner on her's had been so instantaneous that he had never discovered in her the least appearance of attachment to himself. He remained persuaded that prejudices against him had been carefully instilled into her mind by her mother's family, and he never, for a moment, imagined that she had been kept in ignorance of the facts of his second marriage, and of the existence of his youngest daughter. He was therefore often annoyed at remarks which she

made in perfect unconsciousness, and which he attributed to motives which were entirely foreign to her thoughts; what he considered her determined silence on the subject appeared to him heartless affectation, and as his irritation increased, his reserve increased with it. Margaret, persuaded that he disliked her, did not set rightly to work, even in the supposition that this was actually the case. She was hurt at the coldness of his manner to herself, and provoked at his indifference to all her objects of interest, animate and inanimate; and she often put forward, in a marked manner, her English predilections and her English prejudices in a way that, supposing her to be acquainted with her father's history, would have been a want of feeling and good taste. One day especially that she was provoked by some sarcastic remarks which Colonel Leslie had made on English manners and habits, she exclaimed with warmth that "Bad as they might be, she never wished to adopt any others; and that a foreigner would always appear to her a creature of another nature than her own." Another time she spoke with marked dislike and contempt of Catholics, in a tone which Walter Sydney always checked, although he was not himself free from annoyance at the predilection, which, without professing it himself, Colonel Leslie evinced for the Catholic religion. On this last occasion he turned his eyes on Margaret with a stern expression, which soon changed into one of painful

thoughtfulness and deep abstraction. These misunderstandings embittered all their domestic intercourse, and maintained in his mind a sense of resentment against those who were, as he believed, supporting Margaret against him, and keeping alive her prejudices against his absent child. It was in this spirit, and under these unfavourable impressions that the father and daughter met on the occasion we are adverting to.

He pointed to a large green Morocco chair, telling her to sit down, and standing himself opposite to her with his back to the fire, he cleared his throat two or three times and then said abruptly, —

"I have received a letter this morning, which obliges me to speak to you on a subject which has never yet been mentioned between us."

Margaret took Ebro's front paws and placed them on her lap.

"I know not, he continued, what impression it will make upon you. Should it be unfavourable, I trust you will not let me perceive it, for I would scarcely forgive any ungracious feeling on such an occasion."

To command graciousness is certainly not the most likely mode of obtaining it, and as Margaret bent her head down over the shaggy forehead of the Newfoundland dog, a slight rebellious swelling at her heart responded to this unlucky exhortation.

"You *are, of* course, aware that you have a *sister?*"

"Have I?" Margaret exclaimed, as her cheeks grew crimson, and her eyes filled with tears, and Ebro snatched away his paws which she had unconsciously pressed too hard.

"I cannot suppose," her father sternly continued, "that your relations have kept you in ignorance on this point; and among those moral obligations, in which, as I am assured, you have been carefully instructed, I should hope that the duty of receiving your sister with kindness and affection, may be prominent in your estimation." The tone in which this was said stung Margaret to the quick. If her feelings had been left to their natural course, she would probably have flung her arms round her father's neck, and exclaimed in a transport of delight, "Then, I have a sister! Let me see her! Let me go to her!" but her heart was swelling at that moment with indignant feeling at what she considered her father's injustice and harshness to herself; the joy, which that announcement would in itself have caused her, was swallowed up in her resentment at the manner in which it had been made, and she answered with bitterness, —

"I have always loved those who love me; but strangers, whether related to me or not, I feel no but indifference."

Colonel Leslie's brow darkened, and he answered *sternly*, —

"*I regret to* find that such are your feelin

although *they* may not be under your control your *actions* are, and I must request you to bear in mind that on the manner in which you treat your sister, whose acquaintance you will soon make, will in a great measure depend my regard for yourself."

"I ought gratefully to accept *any* means that may serve to open to me the way to *your* regard!" as she pronounced these words, her emotion almost choked her, but she made an effort, an unfortunate one, for it was wounded *feeling* had begun the sentence, and it was irritated temper that finished it, and added — "however unwelcome in themselves they may be."

Colonel Leslie bit his lip, and said calmly, but with bitterness, —

"Allow me to hope that these *amiable* sentiments have been suggested to you by others. I suppose they are the result of the instructions which Walter Sydney has so sedulously bestowed upon you!"

Margaret's eyes flashed fire at this unjust insinuation, and looking her father full in the face, she replied, —

"You do not know Walter Sydney! you can never have known him, or you could not for an instant have supposed that anything but what was good and true and kind was suggested by him!"

Her energy seemed to please her father, and he looked at her with greater kindness.

"*You do not* perhaps know, Margaret," he said,

"that there is a foul and noxious weed which can embitter and stain the purest and the sweetest fountains. *Prejudice* is its name, and one drop of it will turn to gall the milk of human kindness even in the gentlest natures. Walter's prejudices have so often taken the form of virtues, that at last they have become identified with them in his mind, and if you have imbibed them, I can only lament the day when I consigned you to his friendly care."

"I could almost find it in my heart to join in that regret," returned Margaret, "for it is perhaps dangerous to one's happiness to be loved with a tenderness which nothing can surpass, and to see before one, day by day, the example of a goodness which throws all other merits into the shade, and which makes the coldness and hardness of the world so strange and so repugnant."

"I am sorry to hear you have found the world so cold and so hard. Indeed I fancied you were only just out of the school-room, but these perhaps are Walter's phrases; as I would fain hope that some of your sentiments are borrowed from him."

"There is a phrase of his," she returned, "which I *have* noticed and remembered, 'The world is to each of us that scene of action where we meet with our first sorrows, and encounter our first temptations, and that *may be* in the solitude of our chambers, or in the midst *of our family.*' *I* have met with my world to day."

She pronounced these last words so inaudibly that they escaped Colonel Leslie's attention, and he resumed in a dry and measured tone.

"As we cannot enter into each other's feelings, we had better confine ourselves to matters of fact. However unwelcome the intelligence may be to you, I must inform you that your sister will soon arrive in England, and of course soon after at Grantley. I trust that by that time you will have made up your mind to receive her, if not with affection at least with kindness."

The cold manner in which this was said was lost on Margaret. Her face was hid in her hands, torrents of tears were forcing their way through her slight fingers, while her breast heaved with uncontrollable emotion. "My sister! My sister!" she repeated two or three times, and if Colonel Leslie could have read into the heart of his weeping and agitated child, he would have snatched her to his bosom, and the icy wall which had erected itself between them would have melted in the emotion of that hour like snow in the sunshine. But *Silence* — *Silence* — that fearful engine of good and of evil, — by turns the sacred guardian of our holiest feelings, the stern jailor of our purest impulses, or the seconder of our worst passions, — stood between them; and Colonel Leslie turned away and left the room with a clouded brow and a troubled spirit, while his daughter clasped her hands together, and with passionate vehemence exclaimed —

"Sister! Sister! I have yearned for thee by day, and dreamed of thee by night! and now the thought of thee has come like a dark cloud in a sunny sky. It haunts, it bewilders, it oppresses me. Dear Walter, come to me. Speak to me — *you* love me, Walter, *you* care for me. Never leave me, Walter!"

She looked up and Walter was by her side, gazing into her face with that anxious expression with which he always watched every turn of her countenance. That he should be actually there at the very moment when she was somewhat poetically addressing him in her excitement, turned the current of her thoughts, and a bright smile flashed through her tears, as she said —

"Walter, I think you are a magician. I have only to think of you, and you appear!"

He smiled also and answered —

"Why, Margaret, if it requires magic to guess when you want me, I plead guilty to the charge, for I know pretty well when my spoilt child requires her Old Walter to scold her for her tears, and to tell her at nineteen, what he told her at three, that crying is of no use, but to make people look ugly —"

"That is all nonsense, Walter. In the first place, I do not look ugly now. Do I?"

He could not say she did — bright tears were rolling down her flushed cheeks, like rain-drops on a damask rose, — "and in the next place crying does

one a great deal of good. It is like a thunder-storm. It clears the air."

"Then you must not speak as if I had nothing to cry about, Walter; an angry and unkind father is a real sorrow."

"Hush, Margaret. You do not mean what you say."

"I do mean what I say; and more than I say, too. I have a sister! I could love this sister with my whole heart! and this might have been one of the happiest days of my existence. Well, my father made me feel for a moment as if I hated that sister, and as if I was the most miserable of human beings. I can hardly forgive him for spoiling, by his unjust and harsh conduct, the happiness I might have felt at such a moment as this. I should not have wept, I should not have had this aching pain at my heart, on the day when I first heard of my sister. Why did you not tell me about her? I shall begin soon to think you unkind too, Walter."

"Perhaps I ought to have prepared you for this, Margaret, but your father's second marriage —"

"Stop — O yes — I understand — my head is so confused — yes, I see my father married again, or I could not have had a sister. When did he marry? Whom did he marry?"

"He married very soon after your mother's death, (a deep but quickly suppressed sigh was breathed by *Walter as he said this*) and his second wife —"

"Was an Italian, was she not?" interrupted Margaret, "why have we never seen her? Tell me all about it."

"We know but little on the subject Margaret. She died two years after her marriage, and during her lifetime there was little communication between your father and any of us. You know that with the exception of one short visit, he has ever since remained constantly absent, and he has never opened his lips to me, or, as far as I know, to any one here, about his second marriage. I did not feel sure, after so complete a silence, that even if his daughter were still alive, he had the intention of bringing her to England. As I thought you were ignorant of her existence, I did not think myself justified in speaking to you on a subject which might only have disturbed your mind, and concerning which I felt myself so much in the dark. Do you forgive me now?"

"Perhaps I do; though I think we might have puzzled over it together. My sister must be much younger than me."

"She must be about seventeen, I think," replied Walter; "her birth was formally announced to us at the time."

"And what is her name? do you know that?"

"Ginevra, I believe. Her mother's name was Ginevra Ferrari."

"It is a pretty name. I wonder if she is pretty!

I do long to see her! How differently I feel now from what I did when my father was speaking to me! It is like the reverse of that pretty passage in Tasso —

'Cosi a l'egro fanciul porgiamo aspersi
Di soave licor gli orli del vaso, &c.'

'The bitterness was on the edge of *this* cup, and the deep, deep sweetness within.'"

"I hope you will let your father see that you have found it so."

Margaret smiled, and pressed the tip of her tongue on her lips.

"I am afraid of tasting the bitterness again when I speak to *him*. But, Walter, how glad I am I learnt Italian! Do you think that Ginevra speaks English? I shall be afraid of speaking Italian to her. What will grandmamma say to all this, and Mrs. Dalton, who thinks, I believe, that foreigners stand between English people and monkeys, as her favourite sea-anemones between animals and vegetables? But then, of course, papa's daughter is not quite a foreigner. Is she, Walter?"

What Walter answered to this was somewhat indistinct; and at that moment a servant entered to summon Margaret to the drawing-room, where some visitors had arrived, whom she hurried to receive with as much civility as was consistent with her extreme annoyance at their appearance. Walter followed her:

and the new comers little dreamed, as for half-an-hour they made small talk to the inhabitants of Grantley Manor, that there was not one of them whose thoughts were not as distant as possible from county balls, parish meetings, and even boards of guardians, subjects to which Mr. Thornton was seldom wholly insensible, but which were now blended with visions of orange groves and black eyes, to him, indeed, far less attractive, but, at that moment, strange to say, more engrossing.

CHAPTER VI.

It will easily be imagined that during the days that followed the announcement which had created so much excitement at Grantley Manor, the arrival of the second or the Italian Miss Leslie, as she was more often designated, was the subject of every conversation, except when Colonel Leslie's presence interfered with their discussions. Before him it appeared a forbidden topic, and as he was the only person who could have given correct information as to the time and manner of that arrival, and as to the object of this intense curiosity, there was ample scope for every kind of speculation. Colonel Leslie seemed desirous that the present party should not break up; and from this Margaret inferred that he was anxious not to be left alone with her, at a moment, which both equally dreaded, and yet longed for. No words were again exchanged between them on the subject. She made a few timid allusions to it, in the hope of counteracting the false impression he had received from her manner on that first occasion; but he checked all approach to it with so much sternness and decision, that she gave up the attempt, and at last said to herself, with a mixture of impatience and satisfaction —

"Well, he *must* speak, however, before she arrives, or how will her room be got ready? and he does so hate talking to Mrs. Ramsay, that I think he will condescend to give *me* his orders!"

She was struck by the earnest manner with which her father pressed the Sydneys and Thorntons to prolong their visit, and with still greater pleasure she heard his invitation to Edmund Neville to remain with them till over the Christmas holidays, first faintly declined, and then finally accepted. Mrs. Thornton greatly preferred Grantley Manor to the Parsonage; she felt an ardent desire to be present at the arrival of Ginevra, (which event she often told her husband was the turning-point in their lives), but at the same time she would have wished to testify by her absence her utter disapprobation of the existence of such a person — in deed, her unconsciousness of it — for as she had jus assured Margaret, she could not admit the right that foreign girl to be called Colonel Leslie's daugh in any sense, but that she happened to be his dau ter; a fact which she would protest against as lon she lived.

"But as it is a fact, grandmamma," resumed garet, "you must make the best of it."

"I will never bow to facts, my love, when against my conscience."

Mr. Sydney, who was reading the newsp

corner of the room, laid it down to ask Mrs. Thornton what was the precise meaning of bowing to a fact.

Mrs. Thornton never hesitated; the readiness of her answers was quite remarkable, and it was with the most triumphant rapidity that she replied —

"To yield one's own opinions, Mr. Sydney, to the tyrannical force of material obstacles."

"Then I suppose you do not intend to expose yourself to the very material obstacle which Miss Ginevra's presence will oppose to your theory of her nonentity?"

"I shall meet her," returned Mrs. Thornton, with a deep sigh, "as something that exists, indeed, but which ought never to have existed." And having uttered this protest against any share she might have been supposed to have in so blameable an affair as Ginevra's existence, Mrs. Thornton felt herself justified in giving a dignified assent to the request that she would prolong her visit indefinitely, and Mr. Thornton, whose easy disposition was without difficulty reconciled to any scheme that was approved of by his wife and Margaret, offered no opposition to the plan.

The inhabitants of Heron Castle were more stubborn. Mr. Sydney positively refused; and it was at last arranged that he and his wife should return home for a fortnight, but promising to spend Christmas and the ensuing weeks at Grantley. Walter had stoutly resisted Margaret's intreaties that he would at once

remain with them, and persisted in this resolution till a private conversation with her father secured the consent which she had vainly sought. During that interview words which had trembled on the lips of both during the last few weeks, found vent at last, and well nigh led to an abrupt termination of their early friendship; but both had checked themselves in time: both felt that the time was not come when they could explain, upbraid, or, above all, part. Too much was at stake for both. It was not expediency, but a higher kind of prudence that prompted this feeling — the instinctive value each set upon the other's regard. Leslie was displeased with Walter, for he imputed to him what he believed to be his daughter's unamiable prejudices, and Walter was angry with him for what he considered his injustice and coldness to Margaret; but both felt that —

"They had been friends in youth —"

they knew that

"— to be wroth with those we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain,"

and they stopped in time, ere they had spoken words to each other which would have severed their friendship, and sent them each on their separate way in silent pride and unavailing regret.

When Walter, with a stubborn brow, persisted coldly in his intention of leaving the house on the

following day, Leslie made a strong effort over himself, and said, in a thick, and nervous voice —

"If you will not stay for my sake, let it be for Mary's sake."

Walter gave a start, pressed his brow with his hand, and struggled not to speak.

"It is not *she*," continued Leslie, with agitation, "who would have set one of my children against the other, and who, after sowing the seeds of enmity where love should have been, would have left me alone to reap the bitter harvest!"

"Leslie!" exclaimed Walter, with impetuosity, "do justice to your daughter, as you do to her long-forgotten mother, and you may think as hardly as you please of me. If you consider Margaret capable of one harsh or mean feeling — I care not who you suppose suggested it — you do her injustice, and you will some day have to answer for it. If you think *me* capable of setting her against your daughter —"

"Always '*my* daughter!' Can you not call her — *her* sister?" interrupted Colonel Leslie, with bitterness.

Walter continued without noticing this remark —

"Why am I, who love her as you should have loved her, to stay and see what I frankly confess to you I cannot witness without impatience, the coldness and indifference with which you treat her; and to which there may, perhaps, be soon afforded a striking contrast."

"Then stay!" returned Leslie, eagerly. "Stay, if such be your feelings, and warn her from pursuing a line of conduct which will sever for ever those who should ever have been united. I can allow for the vehemence of your language, for I know, by painful experience, that to think those we love are wronged and undervalued is one of the bitterest trials to human nature. But do not imagine" here Colonel Leslie's lip curled with that sneer which had become almost habitual to his countenance "do not imagine that I cannot admire that pretty, spoilt child, whom you have all fed with praises and nursed with homage, until you all, and herself among the number, call it coldness and injustice not to be in constant adoration before her. I do admire her; but I certainly wish she did not admire herself quite so much."

"I will not defend your daughter," cried Walter, warmly, "against a charge which you would not make did you know her better, or myself from that of loving her with the most devoted affection one human being ever felt for another."

"Walter," said Colonel Leslie, "I wonder you do not marry Margaret!"

Walter turned fiercely round. If Leslie had threatened to burn Heron Castle to the ground, or to ruin him by one stroke of his pen, he could not have looked as if a more mortal injury had been done him.

"Is this a cruel jest or a premeditated insult?" he

murmured at last, with a knit brow and compressed lips.

"Neither, I assure you; but my position is a singular one, and I am beginning to be tired of it. It taxes my powers of endurance somewhat beyond their extent. Margaret throws in my teeth, on every occasion, your extraordinary perfections, which, it appears, disenchant her with all the rest of mankind, and you upbraid me for not idolising her very faults with a blind partiality, which, I confess, would become a lover more than a father or a friend."

Walter looked Leslie steadily in the face; his own was as pale as a sheet, and with a strong effort he said —

"Leslie, I give you my most sacred word of honour, that the idea of marrying your daughter never crossed my mind till this present moment. You have done me injustice, but I know you will believe my word."

"But in Heaven's name," exclaimed Leslie with impatience, "are you mad that you charge me with injustice at every word I utter. What have I accused you of? What crime have I laid to your charge, you most incomprehensible and intractable of men? Would it have been anything but satisfactory to me if my earliest friend, if the man whom I respect most in the world, though he tries my temper more than any other, the heir of Heron Castle and the possessor of a large fortune, had taken a fancy to marry a little girl, whose

blue eyes and red cheeks might plead his excuse for throwing himself away upon her? I acknowledge my error, and it was not necessary to undeceive me in so solemn a manner; but I really did suppose that you had made love to the child, and (forgive me if this is any reflection on your great superiority to the rest of mankind), that it accounted for that burst of enthusiasm with which she favoured me, and gave me to understand that we were none of us, myself among the number, fit to wipe your shoes."

"Leslie, we never understood each other, and now less than ever, if you cannot conceive that I would rather have died —"

"Than married my daughter? O, just as you please. The little coquette will, no doubt, have plenty of admirers, and in time a husband."

"I would rather have died," repeated Walter, with a voice that trembled with emotion, "than have spoken one word of love to the child whom you entrusted to my care, or have made one conscious effort to gain affection such as might not have been bestowed upon a father or a brother. Did you really think, as I saw her day by day, during those years of happiness, and all her young pure thoughts were opened to me without reserve, that I had turned that intimacy to account, taken advantage of her solitude, of her warm, *affectionate*, grateful feelings, to win for myself the *treasure which* you, and she whom you have once

named to-day after so many years of silence, had given to me in charge? No, no! Thank God, that thought never crossed me; if it had, I should have flung it from me like a serpent. Though for some years past, I have loved her with the most boundless affection, and would gladly die to secure her happiness; though I feel now that your words have presented to my mind a vision of bliss which will disturb my peace, and may ruin my happiness; I do not the less affirm that if she were herself to come, and put her hand in mine, and with that calm look of confiding affection with which she has ever raised her eyes to mine, were to say, 'Walter, I love you, and I will be your wife,' I would tell her that she was a child and that she knew not what she said nor what she did — the same words I used when twelve years ago, she put her diamond necklace round the throat of a little beggar who had seen it in its shining case and cried to have it. Now, perhaps, you understand me!"

Leslie wrung his hand, and turned aside in silence, but after a minute he said,

"It is all a mistake, Walter — you are as romantic as a boy, and will not see things as they really are; but it is not my business nor my intention to persuade you into marrying Margaret, though it would be but fair, perhaps," — this was said with a smile which, for once, was not a sneer, — "that having *spoilt her by such* noble and self-denying affection as

is rarely met with in this world, you should take her off my hands; but we will not speak of it again. Stay with us. You *must*, Walter. There is a trial at hand for us all. Memory is sore, and those moments are painful when life re-opens the wounds which time has closed but not healed."

These words did what they were intended to do. Different as they were, there existed the strongest attachment between these two men. Walter, especially, loved Leslie with all his soul. He was his oldest and dearest friend. When he had been discouraged and disappointed in early life, he had shown him an affectionate kindness which had never been forgotten. When Leslie married the woman he himself loved best in the world, no jealous or resentful feeling found place in his heart — and as he could not hate him, he only loved him better than ever, for her sake now as well as for his own. Mary's husband, the object of Mary's affection, became to him even dearer than the friend of his youth had been; the last words she ever said to him were, "Dear Walter, always love Henry;" and now when Henry, after a long absence and some estrangement, for the first time gave him a glimpse into his feelings, and that glimpse revealed much secret suffering, the affection and the memories of past years revived, and Old Walter was persuaded to remain at Grantley, and yielded a gruff assent to *Leslie's* last "You will stay then?" just as twenty

years before he was taken out fishing or hunting against his will, and dragged from his beloved books or Mary Thornton's piano-forte by the same half-imperious and half-affectionate compulsion.

On the evening of that day Margaret was sitting at the round table, near the fire, busily engaged in copying one of Flaxman's etchings of Shakespeare. It was the one in which Ophelia distributes flowers to the wondering and pitying courtiers; and she was deeply occupied, either with her drawing or with her thoughts, for, contrary to her usual habits, she had been silent for nearly an hour. Mrs. Sydney and Mrs. Dalton were playing at piquet, Mrs. Thornton was knitting in the arm-chair between the table and the fire, and the two Mr. Sydneys and Edmund Neville were reading the newspapers. At last Walter put his down, and she said to him in a low voice —

"So, I find you stay after all?"

He nodded assent.

"That convinces me of what I would not at first believe."

"What is that?"

"That you love my father better than me. Nothing would make you stay when I begged you, and now, after that endless conversation in the library, it is all settled!"

"Are you sorry for it?"

"O no; my dignity never interferes with my plea-

sure! It plays second fiddle to it on every occasion. Are you shocked?"

"That depends on what you call dignity. I have a dislike to that whole set of words — 'Self-respect!' 'Dignity!' 'Proper pride!' They are either the wrong names for Duty and Conscience, or they disguise, under specious terms, the very tempers against which Christians should struggle. But I do not approve of self-gratification playing the first fiddle, as you express it, on every occasion."

"Oh, you are so hard on that poor persecuted self of our's. Your own comes worst off, like a schoolmaster's son that gets flogged oftener than the other boys that his father may not be accused of partiality; but that is no comfort to other people's selves."

"I thought you particularly admired self-denial, Margaret?"

"When I *read* of it, beyond expression. Do you remember my crying one day, when I was a little girl, because I could not be a martyr, and my asking you very earnestly if there was no hope of a persecution in our days?"

"No, I don't."

"Don't you recollect it? and your advising me to drop some hot sealing-wax on my hand, and see if I could bear it without flinching, before I prayed that the days of persecution might return?"

"That was cruel, I think."

"No; it was a practical lesson which I have never forgotten; it was at that time, too, that I gave Mr. Dempson the print of St. Lucy, which I wished him to hang opposite to that dreadful black leather chair of his."

"Did he?"

"No; he did not think it would keep up the spirits of his patients, he said, and it would make them think him an executioner. But I always took my print with me when I went to that horrid room; and when I had lost one tooth, I did so admire St. Lucy for losing *all* her's. How do you like my drawing, Walter?"

"It is very pretty, but not the least like the original."

"I did not intend it to be. Do you know what engrossed me so much just now? I was trying to represent in this drawing the image I form in my own mind of my sister's appearance."

Edmund Neville looked up from his book, drew the paper on which Margaret had been employed towards him, and examined it attentively. She was still talking in an eager tone to Walter —

"Now, of six people who may be thinking at the same moment of Ginevra, I suppose that no two among us have the same idea about her — the same form before our eyes when we name her. I wonder if our fancies *are* at all alike — yours and mine, for instance! I wish we could all draw."

"We can *all* write," said old Mr. Sydney; and, drawing a bit of paper before him, he wrote these six lines —

"With eyes as black as any coal,
With cheeks as yellow as an orange;
With Leslie's nose, and Leslie's soul,
Just modelled into something strange —
Which English eyes will scarce approve,
And English hearts will never love."

Mrs. Thornton seized the paper, and read aloud this effusion with much emphasis, and a particular pause at the word *never*, much like what street-singers make in the last line of "Rule Britannia," when they assert that "Britons *never* will be slaves." Her conscience smote her, however, at this unqualified denunciation of eternal dislike to poor Ginevra; and she added, with a glance at her husband, and at Walter, who had coughed and fidgetted since the lecture of his father's verses, "Indeed, we *never* can love her with a natural love; but we will try to love her; even as a hen can love the duck she has hatched."

As Mrs. Thornton had in no sense, literal or figurative, hatched the youngest Miss Leslie, the comparison did not seem much to the point, but it satisfied her own sense of duty; that was enough for the moment. Margaret, however, seemed annoyed, and she bent her head over her portfolio with a heightened colour. When she raised her eyes, she met those of Edmund Neville. With a sudden embarrassment, she

took up her pencil again without speaking. He said, across the table,

"You were about to say something. What do *you* think of Mr. Sydney's sketch?"

"That I am sure it is as unlike my sister, as the concluding sentiment is unlike what *I* feel about her."

As she said these words, she held out her hand for her drawing, which he had retained a few minutes.

"You have done something to it!" she exclaimed, hastily. "It is quite altered; but much improved."

"Nonsense," cried Edmund. "What odd fancies you have. I will draw the original of Mr. Sydney's picture;" and he sketched in ink a masculine, foreign-looking woman, with so striking a likeness to Colonel Leslie, and even a slight one to Margaret herself, that all those round the table were in fits of laughter; and the attention was directed from Margaret's drawing, which she put up in her portfolio a few minutes afterwards.

Since the eventful day in which a new page of life had opened to Margaret, she had felt the strongest conviction that Edmund Neville was in love with her. This persuasion gained fresh strength every hour, although he had never again opened his lips on the subject; but he watched her constantly; he appeared anxious on every subject to hear and to understand her opinions; he seemed desirous of speaking to her

alone, but when the opportunity presented itself, he either abruptly withdrew, after a few insignificant remarks, or he became abstracted in thought. Margaret struggled against the increasing interest she felt in him, and, in compliance with Walter's request, she tried to pause, to watch him, and examine herself; but these efforts only served to prove to her how engrossing was that interest — how strong were those feelings. The more she watched him, the more she was convinced that he liked her; but, at the same time that it was impossible for her to doubt this, she sometimes felt chilled and disappointed at the mixture of coldness and hardness which accompanied the lively interest he so evidently took in her. When she sang, he seldom left the pianoforte, but it was with his head buried in his hands that he listened; and sometimes, after asking her for some particular song, he would suddenly walk away before it was finished. No day passed in which her heart did not at one moment swell with the consciousness of being loved, and beat with the hurried pulsation of joy at what seemed some unequivocal proof of affection, and in the next sink with that faint sickening feeling of disappointment which a few careless words occasion when they convey the impression that the speaker's future fate and projects are in no way connected in his mind with our own. To Margaret, whose nature it was to reveal each passing thought, if not in words, at least by the expression

her eyes, or the tones of her voice, the restraint was almost intolerable; and when she had seen, or felt throughout the day, that Edmund had gazed on her for hours together — that if she spoke, he would, in listening to her, seem unconscious of the presence of others — and that a phrase, which he had begun in a tone of levity, would end with a sudden expression of feeling that seemed to promise a renewal of that explanation which she had once so rashly checked, — and yet when no approach to such a better understanding was really made, and he would announce some plan, or make some remark, utterly inconsistent with the vision which she had fondly conjured up — her manner involuntarily grew impatient and irritable, and assumed a character which was not natural to her; or, perhaps, to speak more truly, betrayed faults of character which were scarcely perceptible as long as the current of her life glided on without a ripple to disturb its smooth surface.

One day, when this had been the case, and that she had answered with petulance some trifling question that had been addressed to her, and left the room with a cloud on her brow, and the lines round her mouth curved into that shape which occasionally spoilt the perfect beauty of her face, Edmund turned to Walter, and asked him in a careless tone if Miss Leslie was ill-tempered. Walter turned a deaf ear to the question, and went on cutting a pencil at the wrong end. He

would rather have died at that moment than acknowledged that Margaret was not an angel; but as angels do not frown and slam doors after them, he felt reduced to silence; but in a few seconds he said, in a calm voice —

"She has not been taught by sorrow the severe lesson of self-control. She must learn it some day, but woe to those through whom she learns it, if they deal not truly and gently with her."

"I should imagine," replied Edmund, "that your little favourite was more likely to sin against others, than to be sinned against herself."

Walter raised his eyes doubtfully, and looked at Edmund as if he would have ascertained the exact meaning of those last words. He continued in the same tone —

"I should fancy that her sister will have rather a difficult part to play here. Have you any idea what sort of person she is?"

"No," was the concise answer. There was another pause, and then Edmund laid his hand upon Walter's shoulder, and said in a low voice —

"I have a great mind to tell you what brings me here, and what keeps me here. You are the person, of all others, who will give me the best advice, and I know I can entirely trust you."

Walter's face underwent a sudden change, and he answered with an impetuosity which seemed to take Neville by surprise —

"You are wrong; you can neither trust *me* in this matter, nor can I trust myself to speak upon it. Put whatever construction you choose on my words. I care not what you infer from them, but I will not listen to one word on a subject on which I am not able to do justice to you, to myself, or to others."

As he said this, he snatched a book from the table, and hurried into the flower-garden, where, on her knees on the mould, Margaret was tying up some China-asters, which had hitherto braved the nightly frosts, but whose drooping heads hung down as if foreboding their approaching fate.

"Walter," she cried, "help me to fasten these supports into the ground."

"It is of no use: you will catch cold: come in: leave those dying flowers alone."

"Poor things!" she said, lifting up their heads once more, and then letting them fall again. "They were looking so bright and so strong when I planted them three months ago. Walter, I wish time would stand still or go back, or do anything but go on."

"I thought I heard you wish exactly the contrary yesterday; you said, it never seemed to you to go fast enough."

"Don't quote me against myself, Walter; there is nothing so annoying. *'You said the other day!'* and *'Did I not tell you so?'* are the most provoking sentences in the world, and you are always using them."

As Walter looked grave and did not answer, she continued with increasing irritation. "Nobody can be expected to be always in the same mind, and to weigh every one of their words before speaking, unless they are very old, and methodical, and precise, and tiresome too."

As she spoke she sat down on the stone steps, and began twitching off the heads of the unfortunate asters which a moment before she had so much pitied and tended.

"You will make yourself ill, Margaret, if you stay here any longer. Pray come in."

"I am not cold, thank you. Pray don't stay with me if you find it cold."

Her flushed cheek did not belie her assertion. After a pause, Walter said —

"I pity your friends, Margaret, if they are to share the fate of those flowers. So much kindness at one moment, and such harshness the next."

"I have behaved ill to you, Walter, have I not? Oh! now I am quite miserable. I hate myself, and only wish that everybody would hate me too."

"That is still more unkind to me, Margaret, for you know that is the only thing I cannot do."

The tears sprang into Margaret's eyes; she held out her hand to Walter, and turned her head away. When he again pressed her to come home, she answered *gently*, — "No, dear, dear Walter, let me sit here

a little while. The house is stifling — my head aches, and the air does me good." In a moment Walter had brought from the house a large fur cloak, and wrapped her up in it, with the same care as if he had been dressing a baby; tying the strings under her chin, and clasping the collar so tight, that she cried for mercy, and then laughed; and then, when Walter said, — "Well, it is pleasant to see you laugh again," she burst into tears, and all was right again between Walter and herself. As those bright tears fell fast on the dark fur of the cloak, the cloud seemed to pass away from her fair brow, and after a pause, during which he held her hand in his, he asked her in so gentle a manner what had disturbed and vexed her, that she longed to tell him — that she tried to tell him — but the words stuck in her throat. It seemed so very childish, so very foolish, she said; and there came another half-smile across her face, and a few more big tears rolled down her cheek. At last, with her eyes on the ground, and drawing patterns on the gravel with his stick, she murmured, "It is only that Mr. Neville said to Mrs. Dalton, before me, that he never would marry a short woman, and — and — I suppose I am short." When she had said this, the colour rushed into her cheeks, and she exlaimed with impetuosity, "Do not laugh, Walter, do not laugh. I cannot bear it. I know how ridiculous it must seem to you. I suppose you think it is all childish nonsense.

Sometimes I hope so myself," she added, with a sigh, "but it makes my heart ache very much, whatever it is." Had she looked into Walter's face, she would have seen that it was unnecessary to warn him against laughing. She continued in a moment with increasing emotion, "It is wrong, perhaps, to acknowledge this sort of feeling — to let you see my folly, my weakness. I do not know how I can dare to speak so openly to you, but you know, Walter, how used I have been to tell you everything; and when you ask me in that kind manner what vexes me, I feel obliged to speak the truth."

"Always do so, my own Margaret. It is acting kindly by me, as well as justly by yourself. And may God give me strength always to deal kindly and truly by you!"

"How could you do otherwise?" she exclaimed. "What interest could you have in all this, but my happiness?"

"*None*, I trust," replied Walter, solemnly, "and, as long as you consider me as a friend, and a —"

"Father," she cried, and pressed his hand to her heart. It was the word he was about to use; but the readiness with which she suggested it, caused him a pang; but that pang was conquered, and he continued —

"I shall not complain of my little Margaret, or

scold her for wishing herself as tall as even her favourite maid, Marian."

The gaiety with which this was said, was the most complete victory over self which Walter Sydney had yet achieved; and the triumph was entire when he looked kindly at the little beauty, as standing on tiptoe on the highest step of the flight, and dragging down to her level the coral-studded branch of a tall holly, she turned round and said to him, with one of her own bright smiles — "After all, I am not so very short."

CHAPTER VII.

A FEW days after the conversation that closed the last chapter, Colonel Leslie and Margaret were engaged to dinner at Lord Donnington's, whose house was about twelve miles distant from Grantley. Walter and Edmund were to dine there also, and Margaret looked forward with great pleasure to this rather unusual occurrence; as, since her father's arrival, there had been very little intercourse between her and the neighbours. Lord Donnington's daughters were her only friends, and there was between them that sort of intimacy which usually takes place when girls of the same age have been in the habit, during their school-room years, of looking forward to spending the day, or drinking tea together, as to the dissipation and excitement of their otherwise monotonous existence. Maud and Lucy Vincent had been absent for some months from Donnington Castle, and had only returned a week ago from a tour in Italy. Margaret, who had not seen them yet, was very impatient to renew an intercourse which had hitherto been her greatest pleasure in life; and in her present state of uncertainty with regard to Edmund Neville's feelings regarding herself, she was not sorry *to* have an opportunity of observing him in more

general society than her own home ever afforded. Frederic Vincent, Lord Donnington's eldest son, had been, as well as his sisters, a favourite companion in all her childish amusements, and she had always met him with pleasure in his successive holidays, even when, as an Etonian of fourteen, he was reckoned by his sisters the torment of the house and the plague of their lives. He had maintained his place in her good graces chiefly by his praises of her horsemanship, and his instructions in the management of the numberless pets to which she afforded her protection. This Frederic Vincent, now a young man of twenty-four, was at home again, after an absence of three years. He had joined his family in Italy and returned to England with them. Margaret had not, as far as she knew herself, or as it would be fair to suppose, any deliberate intention of exciting Edmund's jealousy, but, that some idea of the sort had floated vaguely in her mind, it would not perhaps be safe positively to deny. As she finished dressing on that day, and looked at herself in the glass with some degree of complacency, a smile struggled out of the corners of her forcibly compressed lips, which told of pleasant thoughts and agreeable anticipations. When she found herself in the carriage, and, by the faint light reflected from the lamps outside, glanced at the faces of her three companions, she was struck by the contrast that their expression presented to her own radiant state of mind. Walter, who sat opposite to her, looked

the picture of meek resignation. "Dear Walter," she thought to herself, "does not look to advantage to-night;" and so he certainly did not. He was much more smartly dressed than usual; and that sort of smartness which the unpretending are apt to fall into at the suggestion of others, was borne by the unconscious victim without any sense of the extremity of fashion imposed upon him. Then it was also intensely cold. Walter's eyes were red and his nose blue; and, above all, he was resigning himself to his unwonted dissipation with a meek endurance which would have provoked Margaret's laughter if her eyes had not at that moment rested on Edmund's countenance. The carriage was dark, but the outside lamps cast an uncertain light within, which revealed such an expression of gloom and ill-temper as she had never before observed on his features. His lips were moving rapidly, as if he was speaking to himself, and in a moment he drew from his pocket a thin and crumpled letter, and seemed to strain his eyes to read it by the flitting rays of light behind him. Twice he bit his lips, as if he would have drawn blood from them, and then thrust his head back into the corner with a jerk which indicated anything but repose of mind, whatever ease of body that position might give; and when Colonel Leslie, as a violent storm set in, and the snow began to fall under the horses' feet, muttered a curse on the English habit of *dining out* in the depth of winter, and wished himself

and others, in no measured terms, anywhere but where they actually were, Margaret felt her joyous excitement flag, and looked with an anxious eye at the dark sky and the whitening appearance of the road. An impatient feeling crossed her mind as she looked at her companions. "Now if they would but be pleased!" she mentally exclaimed, "all would be right. What a pity people have not good tempers! How disagreeable they all are!" With this charitable thought, and the self-approbation which accompanied it, she also resigned herself to meditation in the corner of the carriage. After a weary drive of an hour and three-quarters, the lights of Donnington Castle became visible, and Margaret's joyous "Here we are arrived!" roused her apathetic companions. In a few moments more the steps were let down, and the hall door thrown open. The drawing-room was full of people, and it took about five minutes for everybody to shake hands with everybody, and for the new comers to settle into the tacit discomfort which precedes the announcement of dinner. Margaret's two friends were as different from her and from one another as girls of about the same age could easily be. The eldest was pretty, and so small, that our heroine looked, by her side, what a few days before she had been so anxious to consider herself, *tall;* her eyes were black and very large, while her mouth was so small that it seemed as if it could scarcely open wide enough to admit a common-sized

cherry. She was indisputably pretty; but yet there was something sharp and resolute in her features, which, had her figure been less diminutive, would have given her an unfeminine appearance. The other was tall, slight, high-shouldered and red-haired; you would have said she was exceedingly plain, if it had not occurred to you first to remark that it was impossible to see a sweeter countenance. This one was Lucy, and the short one was Maud. Both received Margaret in the most affectionate manner, and Frederic Vincent, who was like his sister Lucy, but only much better looking, seemed overjoyed at meeting her again; and, in her happiness at finding herself with her earliest friends, for one short instant she asked herself if the new feeling that had taken such tyrannical possession of her heart, might not, after all, be a mere dream which an act of volition could dispel.

She found herself sitting at dinner by Frederic Vincent, and she immediately entered into an animated conversation with him, having first, by a rapid glance, ascertained that Edmund was exactly opposite to her, and was seated between Maud and Lucy. She had that peculiar talent which some people possess of appearing wholly absorbed in conversation with one person, while they can watch the proceedings of half-a-dozen others; and while she was questioning her neighbour about his travels, and laughing at his view of the hardships of family-travelling with four carriages and a fourgon —

far more severe, he said, than anything he had encountered in Egypt or in Syria — she contrived to observe that Edmund was still paler than in the carriage, and that although he was in earnest conversation with the shortest of his neighbours, his voice was nervous and his countenance clouded. About the middle of the second course, Walter, who was on the other side of Vincent, asked him a question about the Pyramids, which drew from him a long description, which, to her shame be it spoken, did not interest Margaret; and as Sir John Mortlock, her other neighbour, was nearly asleep, having had a hard run that morning, she was enabled to watch, with undivided attention, the conversation that was going on at the other side of the table. What was it that Maud's thin lips had just uttered, which had made Edmund turn so deadly pale that she wondered how she could have thought him pale at all the moment before? and what could it be, that had made him direct a sudden, searching, anxious look towards herself? That look vibrated through her whole frame, and her hand shook like a leaf. Thoughts darted across her mind in all sorts of directions, contradicting and condemning one another. Had Maud said anything against her? Shame on herself for the idea! Her best friend abuse her! Had she said, perhaps, that Vincent liked her, and that she hoped she would marry him? Nonsense! she would not say that to a stranger like Edmund! But what could it be? Cer-

tainly something had been said that had disturbed him. Now he has swallowed a large glass of wine, and his colour is returning. How flushed is his cheek! How Maud is talking to him! She never allows poor Lucy any chance of making acquaintance with people. What can that long story be that she is telling him? And why does Lucy, who never puts herself forward, seem so fidgetty now, and speak to her sister across Edmund, and insist upon telling him something too, and that with a gentle look in her eyes and a scarcely perceptible glance at herself. Now Walter is satisfied about the Pyramids, and before he can proceed to the Holy Land, which he has a great mind to do, Vincent turns to Margaret and asks in a low voice —

"When does your sister arrive?"

This is a very interesting subject to Margaret, and one which diverts her thoughts more quickly than anything else could have done from her previous cogitations:

"Why, we do not exactly know. Papa said, on Monday, that she would arrive about the end of the week; so it might be any day, now."

"O, really! as soon as that! Will Mr. and Mrs. Warren come with her to Grantley?"

"Who are they? I do not know anything about them."

"Nonsense! why your sister is travelling with them."

"I have never been told one word about her, ex-

cept that she exists, and that she is coming. So leave off looking so surprised, Frederic, and tell me all you know about it."

"About *it?* I can tell you about *her*, if you like. We have seen nothing else at Genoa."

"You have seen Ginevra!" exclaimed Margaret, flushed with excitement and looking into her companion's face with the greatest interest. Another keen and anxious glance was directed towards her from the other side of the table, and her heart whispered to her that Edmund was jealous. The thrill of joy which accompanied this impression, gave such a bright light to her eyes, and such a colour to her cheeks, that Vincent looked at her with admiration and forgot to answer her question, till an impatient "Well," called upon him to speak.

"Well, she is a little like you, but on the whole very unlike any one I have ever seen."

"But pretty, pleasing, — is she not?"

"Why — yes. I suppose so. I never felt quite at my ease with her. You must ask Maud and Lucy all about her. I dare say they will differ very much, as they generally do, and then you will make to yourself an idea of your own which will probably be quite unlike the reality. It is so useless to describe people. No description ever conveys a right notion of them to others."

"You are very unsatisfactory, but you can at least tell me where and how you made acquaintance with her."

"It was one day that we were sight-seeing at Genoa. We were going through the rooms of the Palazzo Rosso, when we met Mr. and Mrs. Warren, with whom we were slightly acquainted. They are relations of that Mr. Neville who came here with you to-day."

"Oh, then, the people with whom my governess lived some years."

"Exactly! Don't you remember in what a scrape I got with her the last time I was at Grantley, by calling Mrs. Warren a bore?"

"Yes, I do; and I now remember she said they had been abroad for two years, and she had not heard from them for ages; but, go on."

"Well, they were just looking at a magnificent Vandyke, the first Marquis of Brignole on horseback, and near them was a girl with her eyes fixed on this painting, and it struck me immediately that I had never seen such strange eyes or such a peculiar dress."

"And it was Ginevra?"

"Yes."

"And what was her dress?"

"A perfectly plain grey gown — no bonnet or shawl — but what is called in Italy a mezzaro; a sort of veil which covers the head, and hangs down like a scarf."

"And her face? — now do tell me something of her face."

"I have told you I cannot describe it. It is placid,

and very pale. At times so pale and so still that she looks like a marble statue. Her eyes are of such a light blue that they sometimes appear almost colourless. Her hair also is of the fairest sort. The only dark thing in her face are her eyelashes. They are like a black curtain, and throw such a dark shade under those very light eyes, that it has the strangest effect possible."

"Then should you say that her face had no expression?"

"No expression! — why, it is the most expressive I ever saw; that is the peculiarity of it. Notwithstanding that extraordinary stillness of feature, she renders her thoughts, by the intensity of her countenance, in a way that is perfectly astonishing. Seldom does a muscle of her face move but a speck of colour rises in her cheek — and deepens and deepens — while her eyes brighten and seem almost to shine. They do not sparkle like your's, or like Maud's. Lucy says that you remind her of a morning in summer, and your sister of a moonlight night. I wonder what you will think of her! We met them very often, but I could never make her out. Lucy liked her, I think."

Margaret grew thoughtful, and after a pause, he added —

"How surprised we were when Mrs. Warren, after shaking hands with us, said 'Let me introduce you to

Miss Leslie.' It immediately flashed upon me who she was."

"Do you happen to know how she came to travel with Mr. and Mrs. Warren?"

"I heard that when her uncle died, with whom she used to live, your father wrote to the English Consul at Genoa, and asked him if there was any English family there with whom she could safely travel home. He chanced to show this letter to Mr. Warren, who was slightly acquainted with Colonel Leslie, and he and his wife proposed to take charge of your sister — I believe that was the history of it."

"But Ginevra did not live at Genoa, did she?"

"No, I fancy she came from Verona to join them, but how very odd that you should not know more about it!"

Margaret was saved the necessity of answering this remark, by the signal of departure which suddenly interrupted this conversation, and in a few minutes she found herself in a boudoir, which formed a kind of passage between the drawing-room and the conservatory, with Lucy Vincent on the sofa by her side, and Maud seated on a low stool opposite to them, with her face resting on her hands and her elbows on her knees. Those black piercing eyes reminded her of the dumb show which had excited her attention at dinner, and she remained somewhat thoughtful, till Maud ex-

claimed, as soon as the servants and the coffee-trays had disappeared —

"Are you not dying to hear about your sister?"

Margaret nodded assent, without speaking.

"Has Frederic been talking to you about her?" continued Maud.

"Yes he has — he says *you* like her," said Margaret, turning to Lucy.

Lucy coloured and said, — "She is so very attractive."

Maud bit her glove, and a strange smile crossed her features.

"Then Frederic thinks I do not like her."

"He did not tell me so. He says he cannot make her out."

"Really! Oh I think *I* do, but you shall judge for yourself. Mr. Neville tells me that you expect her in a day or two? How does your grandmamma like the notion of her coming?"

Margaret smiled and shook her head.

"You deal in signs to-day," Maud said; "will you promise me that if three weeks hence I ask you how you like your sister, and you are afraid of speaking plainly, you will give me one of these mute replies?"

"If I should not like her," Margaret said, more seriously than usual, "it will be so painful a subject that I shall not like to joke about it."

"Oh, you will like her, you must like her!" said Lucy, in a low voice.

"Now, really," exclaimed Maud, impatiently, "I cannot understand you, Lucy. You are certainly the most inconsistent person in the world, and if you go on in that way, I must say I shall think it right to speak out. I have no notion of all this kind of sentimental nonsense, and trying to keep people's eyes shut when the best service you can do them is to advise their keeping them wide open."

Lucy bit her lip, and an embarrassing pause succeeded. Margaret felt pained and bewildered. Poor child! it was only since the last few weeks that she had known what it was to feel ill at ease, and she had not yet acquired the art of disguising that uneasiness. Life was beginning to weave around her that thin web of cares too intricate to be shaken off, and too slender to be noticed by others. Maud broke the oppressive silence by a remark which, though less painful and puzzling than the last, was not of a nature to relieve her tight-bound heart —

"Do you know, Margaret, that though we have had little time for gossiping since we arrived, yet we have contrived to hear the reports about you and Mr. Neville."

Margaret grew crimson; except in one single conversation with Walter she had never made or heard any allusion to this subject, and though there was

something not disagreeable in the idea that others had observed Edmund's attentions to her, and that the result she had secretly and tremblingly anticipated was confidently expected by the neighbourhood, yet her hands grew cold, and her cheeks glowed, at this familiar and irreverent mention of what had hitherto been lodged in the deepest recesses of her heart. She answered in a faltering voice, that she had not been aware of the existence of such reports.

"But you acknowledge," said Maud, laughing, "that there is some foundation for them?"

"No, no. I do not, indeed. Indeed I am not engaged to him."

"Perhaps not, but about to be?" persisted Maud; and then added seriously, "I should be very glad that it was so, Margaret. Mr. Neville is immensely rich, at least he is the son of an immensely rich man, and those Warrens we met in Italy describe his father's place in Ireland as the most beautiful that ever was seen."

"And they say he is very amiable," observed Lucy.

The thought suggested itself to Margaret's mind, the involuntary thought, that amiable was not the word she would have used in describing Edmund. Charming — attractive — fascinating, but not *amiable*. No, even in his love (if indeed he loved her) there was a hardness, a stiffness, a want of consideration

for her, even when he was most occupied about her, that was not amiable. But she was in love! Poor Margaret was decidedly in love — for it seemed to her that had he been more amiable, less imperious, less uncertain, she would not have cared so much for each glance of his dark eye, or watched with such trembling anxiety for every proof of interest that his words or his actions might afford. Love does not always blind people. It often makes them keen-sighted, painfully alive to the slightest imperfections in the object of their attachment — but the faults and the failings which are discovered with even acute sensibility, are not hateful as they would be in another — they seem to form a part of what we love, and in our weakness we dare not wish to erase one line of the image engraved in our hearts.

Margaret was roused from these thoughts by her father's voice. He was standing at the door of the conservatory, and made a sign to her to come and speak to him. She went up to him, and laying his hand on her shoulder, he said, in a low voice, —

"I have ordered the carriage immediately. Your sister is arrived."

Margaret looked up into his face. His eyes were full of tears. They were alone. She threw her arms round his neck; he pressed her to his heart, and she felt a hot tear fall on her forehead. Not one word was said, but much was understood in that hour.

When Margaret took leave of Lady Donnington and her daughters, her face showed the traces of deep emotion. When she went down stairs to the carriage, Walter and Edmund both hurried to support her, but it was Walter's arm that she took. A new phase in her life was beginning, and it was to him who had walked by her side, and watched her with loving eyes from the day of her birth, that she was not afraid to show the tears that were streaming down her cheeks, or to betray the agitation of her soul by the tremulous pressure of the arm she held. She got into the carriage, her father and Walter followed her, the door was closed. She exclaimed in surprise, —

"Is not Edmund coming?"

"No," said Colonel Leslie; "he has just told me that he is going to sleep at Earldon Park — Mr. Warren's place. We are to send his servant to him there."

"Does he come back to-morrow?" asked Walter. How grateful Margaret felt to him for that question.

"I don't know," was the answer; "he did not say."

Her heart sank within her, and she bitterly regretted the sudden, and now it seemed to her unaccountable impulse, which had led her to turn from him and to take Walter's arm. He had appeared anxious to speak to her. He would have probably told her when he should return — she would have had some-

thing definite to look to. She almost twisted off the finger of her white glove in her vexation; she would have liked to quarrel with Walter for having offered to take her to the carriage. — "What want of tact to thrust himself forward!" Bad, ungrateful, unjust thought! It was checked at its birth, and Walter's hand was seized, to his great surprise, and pressed between Margaret's, with a sudden emotion which he ascribed to her agitation at the idea of her approaching interview with her sister. Colonel Leslie explained to them, in a few words, that a letter which Mr. Warren had written to him from Dover, announcing their arrival, had been delayed on the road; that in the mean time they had travelled faster than they expected, and that about an hour after they had themselves left Grantley, the travelling-carriage had arrived there. Mr. and Mrs. Warren had gone on to Earldon, leaving Ginevra in Mrs. Dalton's care, who had instantly dispatched a groom to apprise Colonel Leslie of his daughter's arrival. After this communication the silence remained nearly unbroken as the carriage rolled along. To Margaret the next two hours seemed interminable, and she thought the old coachman had never driven so slowly before. When they passed the lodges of the park, the great stable-clock was striking eleven, and the well-known sounds of the dogs barking, and the hall door opening, had never been so welcome yet to Margaret's ears. She looked for her father as

the butler was pulling off her cloak, but he had turned aside and darted into his study, closing the door behind him. She walked straight to the library, but found it dark, and then recollected that she did not know which room her sister was to inhabit; she called the servant and asked him. He said Mrs. Dalton had not thought it proper to decide till the Colonel's arrival, but he believed that the lady's things had been taken to the chintz bed-room. Margaret ran up the oak stair-case, and found her governess with a flat candlestick in her hand on the landing-place.

"O, where is she?" exclaimed the breathless girl.

"In your father's room, down-stairs, my dear. She was with me just now; but when she heard the Colonel's voice asking for her, she was off like a shot. He was at the bottom of the back-stairs, and she seemed to know her way by instinct. They were in the study, and the door closed, before one had time to turn one's self round."

"I suppose I ought to go down — I wish my father would call me. Tell me quick, Dally! — do you like her?"

"She seems a very nice young lady; but, dear me, she is so much taller than you! Who *would* have thought that?"

"I must go," said Margaret, and she went down the stairs that led to her father's room. She expected to be called; she thought the door must open soon;

she heard them speaking — she did not feel courage to open the door. She waited — nobody stirred — a low murmur was all that reached her ears; her heart began to swell, and a sense of pain and irritation to oppress it; tears came to her eyes, and were with difficulty kept from flowing. The night was intensely cold, and as she stood on the stone floor of that passage, the physical sensation seemed to correspond with the chillness that was creeping over her heart. "I can bear it no longer!" she exclaimed, and turned towards the stairs with the intention of shutting herself up in her own room, and giving vent to her feelings; but as she mounted the first step, it did occur to her that it was possible that the fault might be on her side — that knowing where her sister was, it might be expected that she would rush to her without waiting to be called — she returned, and after a knock that was not answered, gently opened the door; she saw no one, but by the lights on the carpet perceived that those she had come in search of were in the further room, a sort of inner recess within the study. With a throbbing heart she drew near, but stopped for an instant, overpowered by an unconquerable timidity. Her father — her cold stern father — was standing before a picture, which, since his return, had hung in that place, but had always been covered with a curtain. It was now drawn aside. Supported in his arms, with her head resting on his shoulder, was the daughter of the woman

whom he had passionately loved, and whose image was before him. His long suppressed feelings had given way. It was an hour of uncontrollable emotion. The past and the present seemed to meet in that instant. A torrent of recollections — of sweet and bitter memories — rushed upon him, and in that tongue which had been familiar to him in his days of happiness, but which, for years, had found no utterance — in that Italian language which had been to them for so long but as the music of a dream — he poured forth, in a broken voice, the remembrances of past grief, intermingled with the joyful emotions of the present hour.

"Idol! Treasure! Best gift of Heaven!" he exclaimed, as he folded his child to his heart, "Ginevra! my Ginevra! Do I breathe again, in human hearing, that name which has never passed my lips for years, but as a cry of anguish. My own, my precious child, call me your father, or say, once — once only, 'my Henry.' No, do not say it; they were *her* last words, and no one, not even you, my angel, must utter them in my hearing."

A low sweet voice was murmuring in his ear, the child he had held in his arms sank on her knees by his side, her lips moved, her eyes turned from the mute canvas before her, first to Heaven, and then on her father's agitated face. The colour that had deepened in her cheek died away, her head was bent still lower

than before, and her tears fell fast on the hand on which her brow was resting.

What was Margaret feeling the while? She was there in the presence of a father, and of a sister, unheeded, unnoticed, unthought of. A strange foreign tongue was in her ears; and the gestures, the tones of impassioned feeling, were as new to her as the language which gave them utterance. She felt with indescribable bitterness that she had no part in their emotion, that neither in the past nor in the present was she anything to her father; her sister appeared to her as a being from another world, who had taken possession at once of an affection of which she had been unjustly deprived. Had she not also had a mother? In her own little room, had she not often wept in silence as she gazed on her gentle features, and had a father's tenderness ever soothed or consoled *her?* These thoughts hardened her heart. She hurried back through the study, rushed to her own room, closed the door, and gave herself up to the bitterness of her feelings. She would shut her heart against those who cared so little for her; she would not intrude upon them with any troublesome fondness, and may be, she would soon leave home, which would never more be to her the home it used to be. She should probably soon marry Edmund Neville, and go to a new family, to new scenes, and to new friends. Walter must often come and see her: she could never bear to be long

separated from dear Old Walter; but as to Grantley — she did not care about Grantley; it was all spoilt to her.

At that moment she drew the curtain and unclosed the shutter, and she was rivetted by the wintry beauty of the scene before her. The moon was shining brightly, the snow-storm was over; but the thick flakes whitened the whole space between the house and the river, which, locked in its icy prison, reflected the lights of the millions of stars that were twinkling in the clear frosty sky. On the leaves of the laurels, and on the more distant beeches, the snow hung in fanciful shapes and graceful outlines, and formed a bed of dazzling whiteness on the ledge of the old-fashioned window where she was standing.

"My home! my English home!" she exclaimed aloud, "what do they care about you — those who make me wish myself away? After all (now an evil spirit at her side espied the favourable moment to suggest a bad thought, which easily took root in the ground which irritation and discontent had prepared) — after all, I do not see why I should wish myself away, or take my father's indifference so much to heart! I am the eldest sister. Grandmamma has often told me that I am the heiress of Grantley, and of all that surrounds it. Ginevra is the stranger here, and if I chose to make Grantley uncomfortable to her, I could do it far more easily than she could annoy me."

At that moment, there was a low knock at the door; Margaret started, and in a trembling voice, said —

"Come in."

She had gone through so much during the last few hours, that she was nearly overpowered by her agitation. She felt by an instinctive impression that it was her sister who had come to seek her; a sense of faintness came over her, and as she was crossing the room to meet her she almost fell. In an instant she was caught in Ginevra's arms, who placed her gently on the couch, drew her close to herself, twined her arms round her own neck, laid her aching head against her breast; and while the eldest sister sobbed as if her heart would break, the youngest soothed her with murmured words of affection, even as if she had been addressing a weeping child.

Margaret felt as if a mother was speaking to her, a strange repose stole over her heart, she wept freely when a soft hand was laid on her forehead, and a gentle earnest kiss was pressed on her burning cheek. The Evil Spirit fled, the icy cord that had bound her heart gave way; she raised her head, smiled through her blinding tears, looked at a face which might have been an angel's, and again hiding her's in that sheltering bosom, murmured —

"Sister, O sister! are you come at last? Not the one I have expected for a few weeks, but the one I dreamt of years ago."

Another soft kiss was pressed on her cheek, and Ginevra said —

"Do not talk, now, sister — your hands are cold, your cheek is burning — I know your head is throbbing — My own! I know you are suffering; you must lie down and rest."

It was true that Margaret felt very unwell; but it was a strange comfort, to cling to her new sister, to yield to her wishes; to suffer her to help her to undress; and then, when she laid her head on her pillow, to look up into her face while she bathed her aching temples. She felt bewildered at the extraordinary reaction of her feelings, at the strangeness of her position. Was that really the sister whom a few moments before she had thought of with such bitterness? But, no, she must be dreaming; — if it was indeed Ginevra, and it was the night of her arrival, ought she not to be waiting upon her, to be nursing her?

"Sister," she exclaimed, rousing herself for an instant, "you have come a long distance to-day; you must be tired. What are you doing here?"

"Resting — dearest — by your side. I should like to stay here all night, watching you sleep."

"No, no," cried Margaret, "you must not stay. Go, sister, go; but let me see you to-morrow when I wake. I shall be so afraid of having only dreamed of you. It is so strange; but I feel as if I had seen your face before. Kiss me again, before you go."

Ginevra bent over her sister, kissed and blessed her, and then sinking on her knees by the side of the bed, she said, in a low voice —

"Sister, shall we pray together?"

Margaret put her arm round her neck, and drawing her close to herself whispered in her ear —

"Are there prayers that we *may* say together?"

"The one that God himself made," answered Ginevra, and her soft low voice repeated the Lord's Prayer, and as the Amen fell from Margaret's lips a heavy sleep closed her eyes.

Ginevra prayed some time longer by her sister's side; she prayed in silence, and now and then printed a fervent kiss on the hand that was unconsciously detaining her's. A low knock at the door roused her from this position. She gently disengaged her hand, reluctantly yielded her place to Mrs. Dalton, and then retiring to her own room, remained for two hours with her face buried in her hands and absorbed in thought.

CHAPTER VIII.

At the time of her arrival in England, Colonel Leslie's youngest daughter was about seventeen years old, but she looked older, and was much taller than her sister. Both had small aquiline noses, high foreheads, very much rounded at the temples, dark pencilled eyebrows, and thick eyelashes; but while Margaret's eyes were of the hue of the violet, or of the hyacinth, those of Ginevra were of the colour of the forget-me-not, or rather of that blue which lies sometimes between the crimson clouds and the burnished gold of a gorgeous sunset, a blue which puts to shame the azure of the rest of the sky. Her hair was fair, and her cheeks were pale; her mouth was the only feature which was decidedly prettier in her than in her sister; it was full of sweetness and gentleness. Her face was calm, but it was the calmness of a smooth sea — still, but not dull — quiet, but expressive. When she came down to breakfast on the morning after her arrival, all eyes were turned with anxious curiosity on the young girl who was a stranger in her father's house, but had come to take there a daughter's place. Her timid step, her likeness to Margaret, the expression of her eyes, at once dissolved all the prejudices

that had been conceived against her, and when she turned from her father to Mr. Thornton, he held out both his hands to her, kissed her forehead, and said, "God bless you, my dear girl," in a tone of mingled effort and kindliness. Mrs. Thornton's embrace followed, and then Walter shook hands with her with a cordiality which he had not imagined he should feel, or have been able to show. Colonel Leslie's eyes often wandered from his newspaper that morning; he did not speak much to Ginevra, but when she spoke, he listened attentively. As he saw his two daughters sitting together on a low couch in the drawing-room, before a table covered with books and work and flowers, their two pretty heads close together, Ginevra's arm round Margaret's waist, and Margaret's cheek resting on Ginevra's shoulder — as he saw their eyes fondly turning to one another, and their hands often busied at the same piece of tapestry — as he heard the sound of their young voices, and the frequent peals of Margaret's joyous laugh, he drew a deep breath, and the weight of a mountain seemed removed from his breast. That day, and the next, and the next, were spent by the sisters in the enjoyment of a new found happiness, new to both, and apparently welcome to each. There was an extraordinary similarity in their destinies; neither of them had known a mother, a brother, or a sister; and with different characters, different educations, and different previous associations,

both had longed for those ties of kindred which no other affections can replace. It was a pretty sight to see Margaret wrapping a fur cloak round her pale sister, persuading her into the pony chaise, or coaxing her into the sledge, and looking at her side like a damask rose by a lily — it was pretty to see Ginevra weave the green-house flowers, the graceful fuchsias, or the many-coloured heaths, into garlands, which each day she placed on her sister's fair brow—it was pretty to see them read together, to watch them at their Italian lessons, or with their English books before them, correcting each other's mistakes with childish pleasure, and chiding each other in sport—or in the old library when the twilight was closing, the shutters yet open, and the fire burning brightly, to hear Ginevra sing the songs of her own land, while Margaret sat at her feet, and warbled a second, as she caught the melody of those wild strains.

"Sister," the eldest would say, as they sat up at night in each other's rooms, "sister, we must travel very fast over our past lives, and be in a few days like old sisters who have always lived together."

And then she would tell Ginevra how happy she had been as a child, how kind everybody had been to her, how Walter Sydney had always loved her, "and tried to make himself into a mother, a brother,—even a sister," she would say, laughing at the contrast between him and the real sister she had found.

"You have been very happy then, always, dearest?" the other would reply.

"Yes, the happiest child in the world; but I suppose a child's happiness cannot last."

"Have you found that out yet, sister?"

"Guessed it perhaps;" and Margaret bent her head over the flowers which she had just removed from her brow.

"Have you been happy Ginevra?"

"Sometimes," was the answer, and then she added quickly, —

"Tell me more about yourself, my Margaret, my *Reine Marguerite*," she said, and gazed fondly on the face of her sister, while she drew from her the little histories of her past life, the expression of her sentiments, the statements of her opinions. She listened to her with unwearied interest, she responded with the keenest and most delicate sensibility, she threw a charm over these conversations, and their daily intercourse, which removed all constraint and embarrassment. Margaret was fascinated and subdued by the magic influence of that quiet and most intelligent sympathy; but at the same time she felt baffled in her efforts to obtain from Ginevra the same unlimited confidence which she involuntarily placed in her; and after a few days had elapsed, her impression was that she had never met with any one who understood her so well, or whom she understood so little, as her younger

sister. She was so unlike any one she had ever met with before, and all those about her seemed to feel this; even Mrs. Thornton, who generally was surprised at nothing, wondered that she could not dislike Ginevra. She tried to tell her that there was nothing in common between them (not specifying whether she meant the room they were to sit in, or the subjects they were to talk about), and the unaffected interest which Ginevra took in her grand-children, in her poor people, in her garden, forced her to acknowledge the contrary. She told her that English people could esteem foreigners, perhaps love them, but never get identified with them. Ginevra felt no wish to be identified with Mrs. Thornton, but with a sweet smile, said, "she would not claim more than her affection, but would never be satisfied with less." As Mrs. Dalton observed, "she did everything well, great and small, important or insignificant," and Margaret could bear to hear this, and she could bear too to hear her sister reply, when, one day, she had asked her if she felt at her ease with their father —

"O yes; when I am with him, I often think of the beautiful words of scripture, 'Perfect love casteth out fear,' and I think it is so with this purest and holiest of human affections."

"Do you indeed love him thus?" she exclaimed, "then no wonder that he has no affection to spare for me."

The tears sprung to her eyes, but afraid of being misunderstood, she hastily added, —

"Do not mistake me, Ginevra. I once thought I should be jealous of you; but all that gave way at the first sound of your voice, at your first kiss, my own sister, and I shall never," she continued, as Ginevra looked at her with anxious tenderness, "never repine that I am not the favourite, if you will but love me as I know he loves you."

The days went by, and Margaret wondered how she could have lived without Ginevra, so necessary did she now appear to her happiness. She was not, however, completely satisfied that she *made her out*, as Frederic Vincent would have said. There was an evident reluctance to enter into conversation on subjects personal to herself, that sometimes puzzled and almost provoked Margaret.

"Can you persuade yourself," she one day said to Walter, "that Ginevra is only seventeen?"

"Why she looks very young, does she not?"

"Yes; but she is so wise, so wonderfully wise! I wonder if it is all real. She is like somebody in a book; and yet I should as soon think my Italian greyhound affected, as my new sister. Such strange thoughts come into my head, Walter, while she is talking to me. Sometimes I think of the scripture text, about entertaining angels unawares; and then again she puts me in mind of that beautiful stanza of Coleridge,

"Her slender palms together prest,
Heaving sometimes on her breast;
Her face resigned to bliss or bale —
Her face! O call it fair, not pale —
And both blue eyes, more bright than clear,
And each about to have a tear."

Margaret had read this passage out loud, and as she put down the book these two lines caught her eye —

"He who had seen this Geraldine,
Had thought her, sure, a thing divine."

"What an extraordinary poem this Christabel is," she exclaimed — "like a bad dream!" Her head rested on her hand, and with the astonishing rapidity of thought, her mind reverted almost at the same instant to Maud Vincent's mysterious hints and advice to herself. "What could she mean by 'opening my eyes?' — and why did Lucy seem so vexed at her saying so? Lucy is the best of the two, though not the cleverest; but Maud is the most affectionate, — at least the fondest of me. She used to wish me to marry her brother; perhaps Lucy wants him to marry Ginevra, and Maud meant that all the time." And then, the next link in the chain of thought brought her to wonder (not for the first time) that several days had elapsed, and that Edmund Neville had not re-appeared, or, as far as she knew, written to announce his return. She felt some curiosity about his relations the Warrens, but neither her questions, nor Mrs. Dalton's investiga-

tions, drew from Ginevra more than the assurance that they had been very kind to her; whether she liked them, whether she wished to see them again, what sort of people they were, and many other similar inquiries met with nothing but evasive and unsatisfactory answers. The interest she felt about her sister, and the amusement she found in her society moderated for a while Margaret's uneasiness at Edmund's protracted absence, and still more extraordinary silence; but at the end of a week she grew painfully alive to it, and watched for the hour of the post, the casual arrival of a note, the ringing of the house-door bell, and the sound of wheels or horses' feet in the avenue, with a keen anxiety, which was very evident to Walter, and did not wholly escape the observation of others.

One morning as she was coming out of her room, she saw Ginevra at the end of the gallery on which her own opened, with a letter in her hand. She was reading it attentively, with one knee resting on the edge of the window seat. She seemed very much absorbed with its contents, and there was a speck of colour in her pale cheeks. Margaret walked up to her and put her hand on her shoulder. She gave a violent start, and turned quite pale, and when her sister said, with a smile, "I am afraid I have startled you very much," the colour rushed back into her face, and she trembled visibly.

"I hope you have had no bad news from Italy,"

said Margaret, while Ginevra hastily folded the letter in her hand and thrust it in the folds of her dress.

"O, no;" said Ginevra, mournfully. "I have no news to get from Italy: my only remaining friends left Verona some months ago, and since my uncle Leonardo's death, and Father Francesco's departure for America, the links that bound me to my native land have been severed one by one, and Italy" — she continued, with a voice of more emotion than she had ever yet betrayed, "and Italy is nothing to me now, but a tale that is told — a dream that has been dreamt — a prelude to the life that is now beginning."

"A happy life, I trust," said Margaret.

"Thank you, sister, thank you," answered Ginevra, in a voice, that without any apparent reason to herself, affected Margaret; her manner was at once tender and abrupt, and she left her suddenly.

That day, at breakfast, Colonel Leslie told his daughters that he had written to Mr. Warren to propose to him and his wife that they should come to Grantley for a few days, and that he had just received a letter announcing that they would arrive the next day. Ginevra gave no signs of interest at this intelligence; but Margaret looked earnestly at her father, with the expectation that some communication about Edmund would follow. She was not disappointed. "Neville," he said, after a pause, "has also written to say that he will return here to-morrow. He has been

delayed, day after day, at Earlsdon, by some matters of business." Walter looked up from the "Times" at that moment, and saw the flush of joy in Margaret's eyes, — sudden, bright, and dazzling, it played on her face, and seemed to vibrate through her frame.

Walter had suffered much from his childhood upward, in the midst of what, to all appearance, would have been deemed a calm and prosperous life. With many sources of enjoyment in his pursuits, and in his tastes, he had seldom met with sympathy in others, and there had been in his breast a store of ardent and passionate feelings which had never found full scope. He had learnt that lesson which either softens or hardens a man's heart — that in his strongest affections he must not expect a return, that his life must be one continual self-sacrifice, and his own happiness consist in the happiness of others — he had early learnt this lesson, and well did he take it to heart; long and steadily did he practise it. To guard Margaret Leslie from the least touch of evil, and, if possible, of sorrow — to watch that the breath of heaven played not too roughly on her cheek, or not a stone lay in her path that he could remove — had been the aim and the joy of his existence. He often forced himself in calm self-discipline to scan his feelings, to interrogate the past, and anticipate the future. He thought of her marriage, he pictured her to himself in the enjoyment of domestic happiness — in the performance of domestic duties — and he could

breathe an ardent prayer that he might thus see her, and never wish to be more than her friend unless, years hence, her affections should be blighted, her heart chilled, or her spirit broken. Then would be his time; then — then — he would bind up these wounds, and pour into them the balm of a love that had known no change, and warm what the cold breath of the world had chilled at the undying flame kindled in silence and nurtured in self-devotion; he had no fear that five or ten or twenty years could dim its brightness or subdue its ardour. There was one question that Walter often asked himself in his stern self-examinations — why was it that, if indeed he had no hope for himself, and no care but for her happiness? — why, when she sat by Neville, and looked into his face as if the destiny of her life was written in his glance, and she lived only in the sunshine of his presence? — why did he, so resigned and self-forgetting, long to tear her away from him, to thrust him aside, and to clasp her to his own heart, as a bird rescued from the snare of the fowler. He fought with himself — he struggled in silence — he forced himself, in imagination, to place her hand in Neville's, to think of her as Neville's wife; but an imperious, overpowering, inward voice seemed to forbid him, even in thought, to sanction this marriage; and, in Old Walter's heart, there were conflicts sustained which were little dreamt of by those who saw him engaged with his architectural designs, or his benevolent

schemes, or, as at the moment we are speaking of, with the leading article of the "Times" newspaper.

During the whole of that day, and of the next, Margaret was in a state of great excitement; she had not before spoken to her sister about Edmund Neville, but now she not only mentioned him once while making some arrangements about the rooms their guests were to occupy, but she often reverted to the subject, and Ginevra listened with patient interest. Once when Margaret had requested her to take into Mrs. Warren's room a nosegay which they had been making up together, she followed her upstairs, and not finding her in the room which she had pointed out, she opened the door of the next, which was the one that Edmund had occupied all the time he had been at Grantley. Ginevra was standing by the writing-table and examining the blotting-paper book. She was turning over the pages with a look of interest, and holding it upside down, she carried it to the light, and seemed employed in making out some indistinct traces of writing. Margaret felt an annoyance, greater than she quite understood, at seeing her thus employed. With that feeling of reserve and delicacy which by nature and by education she was particularly alive to, earnestly as she would have wished to visit that room after Edmund's departure, and to detect and find pleasure in the most trifling traces of his presence, she had never ventured beyond the door, or even supposed it possible to gratify such

a wish. Ginevra put down the book, and moving towards the chimney, stood a moment gazing at the fire, and then walking away and meeting Margaret at the door, started and coloured, when she said to her, "You have put the flowers in the wrong place." Ginevra turned back in silence, took up the vase of flowers, and followed Margaret to the south bed-room.

As the latter turned round to speak to her sister, she was struck by the expression of her countenance. It was, as usual, very still, but painfully anxious; and, as they both laid hold at the same time of a geranium blossom that had escaped from the vase, Margaret almost started at the cold, damp, nervous touch of her sister's hand. She longed to ask her if she was well, but it was difficult to speak to Ginevra of herself. Easy to get on with, as she generally was, and alive, even to a singular degree, to the cares and interests of others, she shrunk, not ungraciously, but with the manner of a sensitive plant when handled, from any inquiry about her own health or her own feelings.

As Margaret entered the drawing-room that evening, she found her grandmother already seated in her arm-chair; and Mr. and Mrs. Warren, who had only arrived just in time to dress, came down a few minutes afterwards. She was a plain insignificant looking woman, with a soft voice, and a common-place manner; a long residence abroad had given both to her and to her husband a distaste to their own country, without at-

taching them to any other. He was, on the whole, a a kind and good-natured man, but had fallen into the grievous error of supposing that to be fastidious was a proof of refinement, and to be impertinent a mark of distinction. He had thrown himself into an arm-chair, and bowed coldly to Mr. Thornton and to Walter when Colonel Leslie introduced them to him, and seemed to doubt, for a while, if he should treat Margaret with supercilious indifference, or with condescending familiarity. Her beauty probably decided the question; and as he took her in to dinner, he said to her, as if he had known her for years,

"Don't you quite adore your sister?" and then, scarcely waiting for an answer, addressed Ginevra in Italian across the table.

There was a vacant place by Margaret, and a few minutes after dinner was begun, Edmund Neville glided into the room, and took possession of it. It seemed to her an age since they had met, and she could scarcely disguise the sudden increase of spirits which his arrival occasioned. He too seemed very happy, and began talking and laughing with greater animation than usual. He begged Mrs. Warren to tell Mrs. Thornton everything about the cold-water system, in the happy conviction, as he whispered to Margaret, that her grandmother would soon wrap all the cottagers in wet blankets; and he at the same time suggested to Mr. Thornton to secure Mr. Warren's interest for the

new turnpike on the North Road. When these topics were set afloat, and the sound of voices enabled him to speak unheard, he whispered to Margaret,

"Ask your sister a question; for I want her to look this way."

"Nonsense! she is talking to Walter, and I will not disturb them. I wish them to be great friends."

"Really! do you think they will suit?"

"O yes, I am sure of it; but he is so shy, and she is so reserved, that they have not made much acquaintance yet."

"She is reserved, is she?"

"Yes, in some ways she is. There is no making her talk of herself."

"That is not a common fault," said Edmund, with a smile.

"Is she not beautiful, Mr. Neville?"

"How can I tell, if you will not make her look this way?"

"You must have patience till after dinner, and then I shall introduce you to her."

"O no, thank you, I hate a formal introduction. You will see that I shall contrive to introduce myself. How have your grandfather and grandmother received her?"

"O, as kindly as possible—particularly grandpapa; and yet, he had a great deal to get over. He could

not endure that papa should marry a Catholic and a foreigner."

"Prejudices are stubborn things, no doubt," replied Edmund, "but affections are stronger; and when they clash, the first go to the wall — How do Walter's stand?"

"They are quite of a different sort from grandpapa's; but, I believe, he fancied he should not like Ginevra, and —"

"I think he likes her very much, now; don't you? Look how they are talking. Can you hear what it is all about?"

"Cathedrals, I believe. Tell me how did you like the Vincents, yesterday?"

"Which of them?"

"Maud."

"About as much, I suppose, as you liked her brother."

"I like him very much."

"Exactly: I thought so; well, I liked her very much. She is a sort of person who would toil to gain her end, and never rest till she had gained it; and I honour such people."

"Why, that should depend on what their aim is."

"Not entirely. There is something great in fixity of purpose, in a strong will and a dogged perseverance, even when there is nothing good or great in the object aimed at."

"Such a *will* as that might make a man more criminal than great," answered Margaret, with some animation. "There is nothing admirable in mere strength of purpose, when it is the result of pride and the instrument of tyranny."

"Moral strength may be the result of pride, but not the occasion of crime — not of debasing, mean crime, at least."

"O, Mr. Neville!" exclaimed Margaret; "is not everything that is wrong, more or less vile? — is not guilt always selfish, and selfishness always mean?"

"I do not call that a mean selfishness, which makes a man trace out for himself a destiny, and be true to it and to himself, even though he may have to sacrifice others in his efforts to reach his end. There is something that belongs to a high order of character in the determination to conquer obstacles, and sweep away whatever lies between us and our object. Depend upon it, Miss Leslie, a scrupulous nature is never joined to true greatness; a man who weighs every word before he utters it, will never be eloquent, and he who debates upon every action before he performs it, will never be great. There is a moral instinct that carries a man through life far better than what are generally called principles."

"How different your ideas are from Walter's! He, too, admires strength of will, and steadiness of purpose, but he says that the will of man is a fearful

power for good or for evil, and, if not rightly directed, may start aside like a broken bow, and destroy himself and others."

At the mention of Walter's name, Edmund had rapidly glanced at the side of the table where he sat, and it was some moments before Margaret obtained his attention, and the conversation was resumed.

"Do you think," he asked her after a pause, "that one person can long withstand the *will* of another, when there exists that fixity of purpose which we were speaking of just now, in one of the parties engaged in a trial of strength? Don't you suppose that intense volition, even if it stops at any guilty means of success, must triumph in the end over passive resistance?"

"I do not understand you."

"Suppose, for instance, that the happiness of my whole life depended on conquering the will of those I had to deal with — in obliging them to act according to my ideas, and not according to their own — do you not think that, granting equality of mental power, my indomitable will must conquer in the end?"

"Walter would say that it depended on the justice of your cause, and, failing that, on the nature of the resistance you met with."

A dark shade passed over Neville's face, and he said abruptly,

"For heaven's sake tell me what *you* think, and not what *Walter says*."

"I think as he does; but I am not as good as he is, and that is why I quote him. I hate talking as if I was better than I am: it is like hypocrisy, though not so really. Living with a person of very high principles and of exalted goodness, is apt to make one good in theory; we fancy ourselves like them, till something proves to us that we are only *electrotyped*," she said, pointing with a smile to a piece of plate of that description which stood before them.

"You are right," answered Neville; and there was another pause. "Miss Leslie, if somebody you cared very much about, whom you loved with all your heart, was to thwart you on the point nearest to your heart, would it alter your feelings?"

With a trembling voice she answered,

"If I loved any one with all my heart, I should have no heart to set on anything else."

The usual bright glance of her eyes was changed to one of timid and diffident anxiety as she looked at Edmund's thoughtful face. He seemed more absorbed in his subject than in her, and went on —

"Your devotion, then, to the person you loved would be such as to conquer all obstacles?"

"Always supposing that nothing wrong was required of me."

"Oh, of course," rejoined Edmund impatiently. "Let us always suppose that, and not make conventional speeches."

"I have never yet been accused of making such," returned Margaret with a mixture of gaiety and annoyance. She, who of all human beings had hitherto been the most fearless, to a degree that would have amounted to boldness had she been less feminine in appearance and in reality, was beginning to feel the tyrannical power of a strong affection, conscious of its own existence, and uncertain of requital; the rising and sinking of her spirits, the colour of her cheek, and the quicker or slower pulsation of her heart, turned upon the gay or the troubled glance of Neville's flashing eyes and the curved lines about his most expressive mouth. Her last words had evidently displeased him, and he maintained a gloomy silence, till the moment that the ladies left the dining-room.

"What do you think of my nephew?" asked Mrs. Warren of Ginevra, as they all stood before the library fire. "I did not imagine that we should meet him at your father's house."

"You thought he was in Ireland," answered Ginevra, who was attentively examining a group of Dresden China figures.

"He is a great favourite with us all," observed Mrs. Thornton; "quite a tame cat in this house, or an *enfant de la maison*, as foreigners say. I beg your pardon, my love, for talking of foreigners before you —"

"It is because you do not consider me quite as a

foreigner, I hope," interrupted Ginevra, gaily. Mrs. Warren laughed, and said,

"You must dress a little differently from what you do now, if you wish to be taken for an Englishwoman."

This was true; for the excessive simplicity of Ginevra's dress was as unlike as possible to what would have been worn by any person accustomed even to the most domestic country life in England. She was in mourning, and her black gown with its long waist, its hanging and picturesque open sleeves, the plain velvet ribbon round her neck, and her hair braided in innumerable tresses, but without a single ornament, made her look very like an old picture, and very unlike an English girl of seventeen. She blushed slightly and said,

"Margaret will teach me."

"Why, Colonel Leslie was so enthusiastic about *your* dress at dinner, that he will perhaps persuade Miss Leslie to imitate you."

"And why should Margaret imitate any one?" Mrs. Thornton began, in a tone that alarmed Margaret; for, to be the object of her grandmother's comments was her particular horror, and she dexterously turned the subject of conversation by holding out to admiration the old lace scarf which Mrs. Warren wore.

When the doors of the dining-room opened, the two sisters were sitting together on a low couch, employed in winding some worsted. The skeins of crimson wool

were thrown across Margaret's extended hands, and Ginevra was holding in hers the ever-increasing red ball. At that moment it escaped her grasp, and rolled half-way across the room. Neville, near whom it fell, picked it up, and brought it to Margaret. She said, with a smile,

"Give it to Ginevra."

He remained a minute standing before her, and with a half-smile on his countenance. She blushed, and held out her hand for the ball. He detained it a moment, till she had lifted up her eyes to his; he then smiled outright, released it with a very civil bow, and then, sitting down on the other side of Margaret, whispered,

"Now, I think, I have introduced myself."

He seemed to have quite recovered his spirits and his good humour, and was more agreeable than ever that evening: it was perhaps one of the happiest that Margaret had ever spent; Edmund seemed so fond of her, and so rejoiced at finding himself once more at Grantley; there was even something gentler and more affectionate in his manner than had ever been the case before. Once, when she had been speaking to him of her happiness in having found a sister, and *such* a sister! and had exclaimed, in her enthusiasm, "Does she not seem more like a creature from some other world than one belonging to ours?" he seized her hand, as he *once* had done before, and murmured in a low voice,

"You are an angel of goodness and of tenderness." The full tide of joy rushed upon her in that instant, and made her heart beat with tumultuous emotion. It was also a pleasure to her that Edmund should appear to advantage in Ginevra's eyes. She had begun to look up to her, and to feel a conviction of her great mental superiority, which made her anxious that she should appreciate and admire him. She was almost provoked at her not taking more part in the conversation that evening. Once or twice she was unusually animated, but at other times appeared thoughtful and abstracted. When Mr. and Mrs. Warren and Walter joined them, the conversation became general.

"How do you like the appearance of our charming country?" Mr. Warren asked of Ginevra.

"Very much," she replied; "but its look of business and activity almost frightens me. What becomes of idle people in England? Do you kill them like the drones of the hive?"

"In England," said Walter, "idleness is treated as a crime in the poor, and is punishable by law; in the rich the law takes no cognizance of it."

"But it often brings its own punishment with it," interrupted Margaret. "The rich are often bored to death with their own idleness, and so come to be considered and treated as bores by others. A day of real idle ennui is more fatiguing than one of hard labour,

and to be thought a bore is worse than to be thought wicked —"

Walter frowned, but she persisted.

"You know very well, that being thought wicked does not make one wicked; whereas, to be thought a bore, is, in fact, to be one; so the first does not signify, and the other does."

Mr. Warren and Edmund laughed, and Ginevra shook her head.

"Do you not miss the Italian sun dreadfully?" said Mrs. Warren, in a drawling tone.

"O no," answered Ginevra, "not yet, and not here. There is a sunshine in this house (she glanced fondly at Margaret) that makes even a dull sky turn bright, — and a heavy heart feel light," she added, in so low a tone that none heard those concluding words, or detected the sigh that accompanied them.

"I am afraid your sunshine will be like beet-root sugar, Signora mia," observed Mr. Warren, who had not understood her allusion, "and only satisfy those who have not known the genuine article, as the phrase goes. I only wish I had never been in Italy. It spoils one for life."

"Do you mean that it has spoiled you or your life?" asked Edmund.

"My friends must judge of the first point, and I of the second. O for a day of Italian warmth and *gaiety*!" he exclaimed, with an expressive shrug and

groan. "You, Edmund, who have never been beyond the Alps, and only dawdled among those horrid Swiss chalets and glaciers, can have no sympathy with my yearnings for the 'land of the south, the clime of the sun.'"

"Does the Italian sunshine," said Edmund, "still form *improvisatores.* Is that gift of inspiration still to be found among the Italians?"

"A qui le demandez vous," cried Mrs. Warren; "the Signora Ginevra is an improvisatrice de la première force, and when the spirit of poetry moves her, she can pour out her thoughts in verses which will stand the test of criticism."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Margaret. "O dear Ginevra, let us hear you now — to-night; it would give us such pleasure."

Ginevra gently refused, and Edmund whispered to Margaret, "Tell your father to ask her."

She eagerly appealed to Colonel Leslie, who looked at his youngest daughter, and said aloud, "She will, if she can."

In an instant she rose and went to the pianoforte, played a few chords in a hurried manner, and fixed her clear bright eyes on her father; one of her hands was raised to her brow, and with the other she continued a low modulation on the keys. All eyes were fixed upon her.

Mr. Warren said, "You must give her a subject."

There was a general silence; at last Walter said, "I will propose one — Hope or Fear."

"Hope *and* Fear," said Margaret.

In a moment the colour rose deeply in Ginevra's cheek, and the light in her eyes seemed to shine with dazzling brilliancy. The moment of inspiration was come. Her glance wandered from her father's face, and appeared to rest on Neville's. His was fixed on her with earnest expectation. She spoke not, the colour faded from her cheek, and the hand that had been raised to her brow fell slowly on the keys. In a moment she began playing, and the low uncertain hurried tones which she drew from the instrument, seemed to express the vague instinctive approaches of a dawning apprehension. The melody changed into wild notes that oppressed the soul like the spell of an increasing terror; they rendered, with a mysterious power, the acuteness of agony; and then, as the sound of rain on the parched ground, or as the small cloud in the sky when the earth is famishing, a few faint notes, the returning whispers of hope in the soul, rose and fell in strange alternations, now swelling like the breeze on the sea, now dying away like the expiring murmurs of a distant storm, till at last one sudden, triumphant, exulting burst of melody resounded in the ears, and re-echoed in the hearts of the listeners. Again and again rang that victorious peal, with so clear, so thrilling, so *transporting* an accent, that Walter, covering his face

with his hands, could only find vent for his emotion by uttering those words which express the last and sublimest triumph of hope over fear — "O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?"

The last notes of that glorious harmony had died away, but seemed still to float in the silent air, and no one spoke or moved, so deep was the impression produced, till Ginevra herself rose, and walked away from the pianoforte. Margaret kissed her without speaking; Mr. Warren called her St. Cecilia; Mrs. Thornton began telling Mrs. Warren, in a low voice, what a wonderful talent for music Margaret had, but that for her part she had never wished her to be a Muse, or an Improvisatrice, or a St. Cecilia, or anything of that kind.

"Why did you not speak as well as play?" asked Mr. Warren, after a pause.

"I did what I *could*," she answered, with a glance at her father.

Edmund Neville, who had been sitting opposite the pianoforte, and had not moved since she had begun playing, suddenly crossed the room and sat down by her. They spoke together for a few minutes in a low voice. Margaret thought he was praising her talent, and wished she could play like her, or praise like him; for there was an expression in his eyes that she had never seen before, and which she ascribed to the magic power of genius. And could she wonder that he felt its influence, when there was not a nerve in her own

frame that was not thrilling with admiration and excitement under the resistless spell of that bewitching harmony? — and could she wonder that her sister listened with a look of agitated and intense interest to the eloquent words whose power and whose charm she knew but too well? She did not wonder, but perhaps she trembled. Perhaps a vague apprehension crossed her mind in that moment, faint as the first notes of Ginevra's melody; but it was soon swallowed up in the happiness of the next hour, for Edmund came and told her that he had finally resolved on furnishing and inhabiting Darrell Court, an old house in the neighbourhood, which had belonged to his family for many hundred years, and which his father had given up to him. He made her promise to drive over and see it on the first fine day; he consulted her on various points connected with his projects, and asked her advice, and praised her taste, and sketched designs, and described balustrades, till the cloud that had for an instant hung over the brightness of that happy evening passed away from her heart and from her brow, like a light vapour from a sunny sky.

CHAPTER IX.

THE next day but one was Sunday; Ginevra had gone early to the Catholic chapel at Marston, and only returned after the vesper service. It was getting dark when she reached home, and after hastily kissing her father and her sister, she shut herself up in her own room. At the usual hour that they sat together before dressing time, Margaret glided in, took her place on the low stool by the fire, and began playing unconsciously with the beads of her sister's rosary, while Ginevra, drawing some white and pink camellias from a straw basket at her feet, arranged them in a wreath.

"You see I did not forget my visit to the greenhouse," she said, while proceeding with her task: "I mean this wreath to be my *chef d'oeuvre*. What have you been doing to-day, Margaret? — since church, I mean."

"O nothing," said Margaret; "we generally take a long walk in the afternoon when there is no service, but everybody objected. Walter was lame again, and Edmund Neville cross. I cannot conceive what put

him out. He was in such spirits yesterday, and to-day he has been looking as black as thunder, and hardly spoke to any one. I do not like people to have such uncertain tempers! Do you, Ginevra?"

"No," said her sister gently; "but in this perplexing world, dear Margaret, it is hard to tell whether it is suffering or temper that clouds the brow, and oppresses the heart. To be always calm is to *some* impossible, to *all* difficult," she added, while a scarcely perceptible sigh escaped her.

"I believe you are the most perfect person in the world," exclaimed Margaret, raising her eyes from the fire to her sister's face, which was paler than usual.

Ginevra started, and laying her hand on Margaret's mouth, said eagerly, "Never say that again, dearest;" and while she placed the last bright flower among the shining leaves, she continued, "and never judge hastily; never condemn harshly, but remember how little you know of life, and of its trials. May you never meet with any but what God sends you! May you never make any for yourself, for such are the hardest to bear! Pray for those who suffer. They may be sorrowing saints — they may be repenting sinners; but

if they suffer, you cannot do amiss in praying for them. They need it so much. There now, let me put this flowery crown on your head. I have made you thoughtful with my sermon, but lay it to heart, my sweet sister; learn to weep with those who weep, and may others never have but to rejoice with you!"

When the sisters met again in the dining-room, Edmund was seated next to Margaret. He, at first, seemed unable to rally his spirits, but by degrees he grew excited, and his gaiety, which was usually quiet, was almost boisterous. This continued in the evening; and, in the course of conversation, he began talking again of Darrell Court, and pressed Margaret to go there the next day. She turned to Ginevra, and asked her if she would like it; and was rather disappointed when she answered coldly, that Mrs. Warren wished to see the place again, and would, she knew, gladly accompany her.

"Are you quite determined to settle there?" asked Walter in a moment.

"*That*," replied Neville, "depends on circumstances over which I have no control. I am in the hands of others, and on their decision turns the happiness or misery of my life."

He said this with a flushed cheek and a hurried manner, and his words produced an instantaneous effect on his three hearers. Walter turned pale, for he saw before him the crisis he had so long anticipated; and Margaret felt her heart beat with joyful emotion as she now foresaw, that in the home of his ancestors, in his own future abode, he would open his heart to her, and claim the acknowledgment of her love in return for the avowal of his. She glanced timidly at Ginevra, and perceived that her cheek, her brow, and even her temples, to the very roots of her hair, were suffused with a deep blush, which proved that she, too, must have seized the allusion, and how clear its import must have appeared to her. Recovering herself from her agitation, Margaret proposed to go and consult Mrs. Thornton and her father on the intended expedition, and Edmund eagerly urged her to do so.

"Mind you succeed in arranging it," he exclaimed, as she rose from her place. "You know I cannot bear to be thwarted, and will *never* forgive you if your negotiation fails. I have so much for you all to do at Darrell Court. You, Walter, must undertake the chapel."

"And what do you intrust to me?" said Mr. Warren, who had joined them.

"The dining-room and the picture-gallery."

"And to me?" said Margaret, who was lingering at the door of the music-room.

"The flower-garden, or the breakfast-room."

"And to my sister?"

Edmund turned, and trying to catch Ginevra's eye, said gravely —

"Will she choose for herself?"

But as she did not answer, he addressed himself to Walter, and begged him to show Mr. Warren the engravings in the library, from which he was to select a design for a new window in the chapel of Darrell Court.

"My uncle," he said, "is not, I believe, much of an ecclesiologist, but he is a good judge of anything connected with art."

Mr. Warren, with a manner that implied that he would do the designs the honour of looking at them, followed Walter into the library. Margaret, in the meanwhile, went up to the whist-table, and while Mrs. Sydney was dealing very slowly, she explained her plan for the next day, or rather announced it. She met with no opposition; only Mrs. Thornton assured her, with a sigh, that she had herself become a mere

nothing in the family; that she was at the mercy of everybody, and washed her hands of it. Of *what* she washed them would have been difficult to find out; but she repeated the expression energetically two or three times, and then applied herself to the sorting of her cards.

"So you are going to help Mr. Neville to take possession of Darrell Court," whispered Mr. Thornton, so audibly that Mrs. Sydney started and mis-dealt; "and what if he was to ask you to do so for good — what should you say to that, Miss Margaret?"

"Nonsense, grandpapa! what very odd ideas come into your head!"

"Which never by any chance come into your's, Meg — heigh?" A kiss on his mouth was his granddaughter's answer, and she hurried away in search of Colonel Leslie.

Later in the evening, as she was sitting by Walter in the library, Ginevra joined them. Suddenly Margaret recollected that she had not given Edmund an answer about the next day's proceedings, and, not sorry to have a good excuse for returning to the drawing-room, she left Walter and her sister alone together. He raised his eyes from the portfolio he had been

examining, and they met those of the young girl who was sitting opposite to him. He had felt an increasing interest about her during the last few days. Like most reserved persons, he had a quick insight into human feelings, and having often suffered in silence himself, he easily detected the marks of silent suffering in others. That she was unhappy *now* he could no longer doubt. He had sometimes fancied before that her eyes had filled with tears, which a firm resolution had alone restrained from flowing, but now he saw them stealing down her cheek faster than her hand could brush them away. He addressed to her some trifling observation, and her mouth quivered when she attempted to reply. There was not a shade of temper in her face; but it was evident that she was struggling with a powerful emotion, and steadily endeavouring to subdue it. Walter's prejudices would not have been easily conquered, had this young girl appeared happy, or had she, on her arrival among them, displayed a childish or ungracious sorrow; but as it was, she was suffering, and she was struggling. The source of that suffering he knew not; where she found strength to struggle he discerned not yet; but he longed to soothe that pain, and to help those efforts, as he would have

longed to feed the hungry or to shelter the naked. He pushed the portfolio towards her, and said —

"Have you seen these engravings?"

She looked at them at first in silence; but by degrees grew interested, and then animated. A print of St. Peter's Martyrdom seemed to fix her attention; she said, in a low voice, as her head was bent over it —

"He must have known he was forgiven *then* — his long penitence accepted — his trial ended! His sufferings must have been to him a pledge of pardon."

In general Ginevra was not perfectly at home in English; but when the subject incited her, she was eloquent in a manner peculiar to herself. Her language was picturesque, and she spoke as others write, but with a simplicity that took away from her *conversation* all appearance of effort or affectation. There was something in the tone of her observations which harmonised with the secret impressions of Walter's hidden life — that life of the soul which holds its deep and silent course apart from all outward converse with the world, or even from the most intimate associations of our homes and hearts. The writings of past generations, the solitary studies of years, his instinctive yearnings after a deeper faith and a wider sympathy

than his own religious education or his own times afforded, had prepared him to feel for the young Italian, and he was listening to her original thoughts clothed in eloquent and expressive language, with an interest mingled with curiosity, when he perceived that she suddenly checked herself, and turning round, he saw Edmund Neville enter the room, and approach the table where they were sitting. He took up one of the illuminated sketches, and carelessly inquired if that was the design for his chapel.

"It is the one I had fixed upon," replied Walter. Are you going to Darrell Court to-morrow?"

"I believe Miss Leslie has arranged it. Has the Signora Ginevra made up her mind to accompany us?" he added in a low voice, as he rapidly turned over the leaves of a book he had seized hold of.

"Why should not you go?" said Walter, seeing that she made no answer to Neville.

"Because I have not strength for it," she replied slowly, as if it cost her an effort to speak.

"Are you ill?" he exclaimed; "I am sure you are ill. Shall I get you some water?"

She nodded assent, and he rushed to the door, almost knocking down two tables on his way. When

he returned a few minutes afterwards, with a glass of water in his hand, he found Ginevra alone; she was standing by the table, and he thought she trembled as she extended her hand to take the glass; she raised it to her lips and tried to drink, but not succeeding, put it down, turned to walk away, and then sat down as if unable to cross the room.

"I shall call your sister," said Walter.

She shook her head, laid her hand on his arm to detain him, gasped for breath, and then burst into an agony of tears. Walter took her hand, and said in a serious manner —

"Ginevra Leslie, you are very unhappy. How shall you bear to live among strangers, and never to open your heart to any one?"

She made a strong effort, subdued the nervous agitation that had overcome her, and answered calmly —

"I have given way before you. Do not take advantage of my weakness. Do not tell my father and my sister of this uncontrollable emotion. It was sudden, but you see it is short."

"But there is a *cause*," said Walter, "and a deep one."

"O, have we not all of us," she exclaimed, "a

well-spring of suffering in our hearts which we keep down with a strong hand, and which we master with a strong will?"

"Do not trust too much to your strength," said Walter, as he saw the paleness which again spread over her face.

"I would not," she said earnestly — "I would not if it were my own strength, but God gives it, and He will not withdraw it, though sometimes my own heart rises against me with such violence that I quail before it."

"I have seen you for a few days, and scarcely knew you an hour ago, but I would fain serve you. May I? — can I?"

"Mr. Sydney," said Ginevra, and she took both his hands in hers, "you have been very kind to me to-day; and I do not regret," she stopped a moment and then went on — "I do not regret that you have seen me thus agitated — thus disturbed — you will not think hardly of me — I know you will not."

Her voice faltered, and Walter interrupted her.

"It is so natural that you should feel depressed — you are so very young. Everything here must appear strange to you; and you have had afflictions," he

added still more gently, and glancing at her black dress; "and some of those you love, though not taken from you by death, are far away, and you would fain see them again — you would fain see your own home and speak your own tongue again."

She raised her pale but most expressive eyes to his face, and said, slowly —

"There is one at whose feet I should wish to kneel, once again, before I die; but he is not where my home was. It is my mother's uncle," she continued, as Walter looked at her inquiringly, "Father Francesco; he left Verona a year ago for a distant mission; he grieved to leave me, but his duty called him, and he went — for how long I know not. On earth I may never see him again — and yet I think I shall — not now, not soon—but once more in my life. It is when the agony deepens, and the shades darken, that angels are sent to us. Perhaps," she continued, with increasing emotion, "perhaps he will come to me when my strength is failing, and evil is waxing strong, and hope is forsaking me—perhaps God will send him to say to me, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?'"

She hid her face in her hands and remained silent.

Walter looked at her with inexpressible interest, but scarcely knew what to say. She seemed very unhappy; perhaps the excess of her grief was childish; at least, she could have no reason for gloomy forebodings, and he tried to say so. She listened to him for some minutes without altering her position, and while he spoke of her father's love, of her sister's joy at finding her so charming and so kind, Walter grew quite eloquent. In a few moments she raised her head and smiled sweetly. The last words she uttered had brought with them the strength she needed. She had ceased to doubt. Her brow was calm and her eye was bright. Whatever was the spirit that had moved her soul erewhile, one mightier still had now gained the mastery. Whatever billows were gathering about her, she was treading them again with a firm step, and measuring them with an unshrinking eye. She rose, held out her hand to Walter, and glancing once more at the engraving which he had shown her, she said in a low voice —

"Pray for me, that my faith may never fail me."

The following morning Margaret woke early with her mind full of excitement at the thoughts of the projected expedition, and from her muslin-curtained bed watched with impatience the unclosing of the shutters,

it was snowing heavily, and she turned towards the wall with a feeling of keen disappointment. She called to her maid, in a sleepy voice —

"Grace, have you been to my sister's room yet?"

"Yes, Miss; half an hour ago. Miss Ginevra was up and dressed."

"So early," cried Margaret, with a prolonged yawn.

"Those foreigners have such queer habits," Grace observed. "They never can do things like other people. Who ever heard of a young lady not having a maid, and dressing herself? But then, to be sure, I have heard it said that Miss Ginevra was brought up in a mean sort of way, and that her mother was not a real lady, not even in her own country."

Margaret felt provoked at this speech, but did not exactly know how to show her displeasure. While Grace was doing her hair, she returned to the same subject.

"Mrs. Warren's maid says that Miss Ginevra does nothing like the rest of the world, and she does not set much store by such people, — Mrs. Henderson does not. She says, they never come to much good in the *end.*"

"What nonsense you are talking, Grace! Of course my sister does not dress or talk exactly as we do, because she was brought up differently. It would be very odd if she was like us in everything."

"So indeed it would, Miss, and being a Papist, too, poor thing. Mrs. Henderson says, they never slept anywhere on the road but Miss Ginevra was off to church before breakfast; but all that church-going, as Mrs. Henderson says, does not come to good at last."

"What do you or Mrs. Henderson know about it? I dare say we should all be the better for going oftener to church. Mr. Sydney thinks so, and walks a great way off every day for daily service."

"O but your grandpapa's butler says, Miss, that Mr. Walter is a Papist in disguise; and Mrs. Henderson would not be at all surprised if Miss Ginevra was to talk him over into being one in good earnest. John said they was looking at them Papish books in the library last night, and they was shaking hands over them, and Miss Ginevra was crying when he went in to put coals on."

"Shaking hands and crying? What are you talking about?" exclaimed Margaret impatiently; but at the same moment she remembered that, when going to bed

the night before, she had remarked traces of tears on her sister's face; and she felt annoyed at the idea that something had passed between her and Walter with which she had not been made acquainted. "She treats me as a child," was her next feeling; "she kisses me, puts flowers in my hair, calls me her Reine Marguerite; but, now that I think about it, not one word has she said to me of her thoughts, of her feelings, of her past life — of herself, in short. And now, it seems, that Walter and she have been talking together in the most confidential manner — have been forming a secret friendship. I really have borne a great deal. I did not mind Mrs. Warren's saying rather rudely before me, how much papa admired her the most, — her dress, at least, — which comes to the same; and I told her she was the favourite, and that I did not mind it — and I do not mind it; but if Walter and she are to have long *tête-à-têtes*, and I am to be neglected by everybody —"

Grace, who had been too busily engaged with some of her professional duties to speak during the last few minutes, now began again —

"Mrs. Henderson can't think how her lady came to allow Miss Ginevra to walk out by herself, as she

did, abroad, and not to wear a bonnet on, too. She says it gave her quite a turn the first day she saw her in the street, dressed in that queer fashion. It 's so very unbecoming and bold like."

"Not when it is the custom," said Margaret, impatiently.

"Oh no, to be sure, Miss, it is all custom; and many foreign customs we shall have to put up with here, no doubt; perhaps we may all have to walk out without our bonnets soon, for they say the Colonel is so partial to Miss Ginevra, that she will have everything her own way before long."

Margaret's cheek was very much flushed at that moment; whether it was that she was stooping over the fire lacing a very tight boot, or that her pride was stung to the quick at finding that her father's preference for her sister was noticed and commented upon even by the household. In a voice that betrayed irritation, she replied —

"I really must request, Grace, that you do not make remarks of that sort in future. They are unbecoming in you, and very disagreeable to me."

Grace, who was about the same age as her mistress, and nearly as much spoiled, had no notion of

being snubbed in this manner, and began to justify herself in a tone of mingled anger and plaintiveness.

"Indeed, Miss, as to making any disagreeable remarks, it is the last thing I ever think of doing; but I am much attached to you, and I have been many years in the family, and I cannot bear to think of your being put upon or cut out in any way; and when I heard it said you would be put on the shelf, and your youngest sister, a foreigner and a Papist, too, be set up above us all, it went hard with me."

"You really forget yourself, Grace," interrupted Margaret, indignantly. "I cannot suffer such things to be said to me."

"Very well, Miss; very well;" murmured Grace, with a look of much resignation. "I will not say another word; no, not if the grass was to be cut from under your feet, or the very bed taken from under you; no, not if Miss Ginevra was to set her cap at Mr. Neville, wich she is very likely to do — for Mrs. Henderson says there never was a gentleman yet she did not make fall in love with her; and she was walking home with him yesterday: when they passed before the woodman's cottage, and when they came near to the *park gate*, she turned one way, and he another; but I

don't care; it does not signify. I won't say another word, though she were to be married before you, and you had to be her bridesmaid."

At this climax Grace burst into tears, and Margaret desired her to leave the room.

Her pensive and troubled countenance as she leant against the chimney after dismissing her maid, showed the restless workings of her mind. She brooded over her words, and called to mind divers trifling circumstances which had occurred during the last few days, with an anxious desire to define or to dissipate the vague suspicions which were crowding into her troubled imagination. Her thoughts ran to and fro, as she rapidly paced her little room, and now and then resumed her previous attitude. "Was it, indeed," she thought, "a true presentiment that cast such a dark shade over the days that preceded Ginevra's arrival? Has she come with her strange beauty, with her smooth tongue, with the magic of her genius and her resistless captivation, to steal away from me the heart of Edmund Neville? Was it to him that she addressed, on the night of his arrival, that strain of impassioned harmony which seemed to draw him to her side, and to fill his soul with indescribable emotion? She met him yesterday, and spent

in his society the very hours in which I wandered alone in silent disappointment; and afterwards she spoke honied words to me, and crowned me with flowers, and affectedly disclaimed my praises. But then what will follow? What will happen? What can I do? How can I compete with her? I cannot smile, or sing, or talk, like Ginevra; I cannot look like an angel and act all the time a cruel and deceitful part. Is it not hard that she should snatch away from me my cup of hope and of happiness, and wring my heart with anguish, which I must bear in secret! for none must know — (here the poor child's grief found vent in tears) — none must know how I have loved him, how I love him every day more devotedly; but they will know — they have seen — how Walter will pity me! — (now a burning blush covered her cheeks); and grandpapa, who was saying yesterday — but it is impossible; I think I must be dreaming or mad to suppose it. He has but just seen her; he scarcely knows her. Three short days cannot have changed him, and destroyed all my happiness. Her heart is calm and free; mine is throbbing as if it would break from my breast. Shall I tell her that I love him? O no, I am afraid of her. I cannot upbraid her, and I dare not ask her to have mercy;

and yet perhaps she would. Can it be that Edmund has confided to her that he loves me? and that they met to speak of it yesterday?"

Like a flash of summer lightning on a cloudy sky, that last idea crossed the gloomy forebodings of the anxious girl, and a train of joyful anticipation followed in its track. The more she dwelt upon it, the more probable it appeared. Guileless as a child, and open as the day, she could with difficulty attribute evil motives to others; and in the warmth of her own affection, she reckoned on theirs, and was now ready to fly to her sister's feet, confess her suspicions, and implore her forgiveness for having in her secret thoughts unjustly accused her. Under this impression her manner to Ginevra was still more affectionate than usual, and she endeavoured to find her alone, and to enter into conversation with her; but this was more difficult than it appeared, and without refusing to sit with her, or to talk to her, it so happened that her sister was almost always engaged in some other manner when she proposed it, and seldom left the drawing-room, where the continued snow kept most of the party prisoners. Edmund Neville proposed one morning to

read out loud, and the offer was joyfully accepted by Margaret.

"Shall it be in English or in Italian?" he inquired, glancing at Ginevra, who smiled and said —

"You will make too many mistakes."

"O no," he replied, "I am a tolerable Italian scholar, and your sister wishes, I know, to hear the 'Promessi Sposi.' Don't you, Margaret?"

She said "Yes" rather coldly, for he had opened the book, and changing his place beside her for one on the sofa where Ginevra was sitting, he turned to her with that peculiar expression which now and then gave softness to his piercing eyes, and said,

"Stop me when I make some great fault, but do not be *too severe.*"

She gently shook her head, lifted for an instant her dark eyelashes, and bent upon him a glance of such indescribable tenderness, that Margaret felt her hopes die away, and her fears return with renewed bitterness. During the two hours that followed, the sisters seemed for a while to have exchanged positions and characters. Margaret sat listening to the voice of the man she loved. But, melodious as it was, in her

ears the sweetness of its tone had vanished. Silent and gloomy, but rivetted to the spot as by some spell, she heard him read the beautiful opening description of Manzoni's incomparable novel; and when she laughed at the inimitable account of Don Abbandio's meeting with the bravoes, there was a nervous expression in her face, and a painful quivering about her mouth. On the other hand, it seemed as if the reserve and the composure of Ginevra's usual manner had given way for a while to an animated interest — to a sympathetic excitement. Her eyes, usually fixed on her work even when conversing with others, were now raised sometimes to Neville's face, sometimes on the broad snowy landscape without; her hands, usually so busily employed, were now resting, one on the back of the couch, and the other on her breast, while she clasped the velvet ribbon that bound her neck. She seemed to breathe more freely than usual, to laugh more carelessly, to have given her spirit a holiday. Sometimes she took the book from Neville, and read a few sentences herself, or, leaning over his shoulder, she imitated the Milanese accent while pronouncing Agnese's enchanting *naïvetés*, or Renzo's charming rusticities; and once, as she was uttering with admirable grace

and feeling the following words: "Ma il pensiero di Lucia quanti pensieri traeva seco! Tante speranze! Tante promesse! Un avvenire cosi vagheggiato, cosi tenuto sicuro! e quel giorno cosi sospirato!" he turned his face towards her — their eyes met, her fair hair almost touched his dark locks, — and even when she had ceased to speak he seemed still to listen, and she to repeat in the silent language of her eyes, what her lips had just uttered. Turn by turn they read, and Margaret watched; each moment seemed an age — each moment she was on the point of starting up indignantly — of leaving them abruptly. They seemed to forget her presence, almost her existence; she ceased to attend, or to follow the sense of the words. Her thoughts were no longer with Manzoni's creations; they had reverted to that wild and unfinished poem, that strange Christabel, which had already haunted her mind and disturbed her imagination. She felt as if a spell was upon her — as if she, too, had seen in that hour what no one else had seen, what no one else would ever believe, what she dared not describe, what she scarcely comprehended; but this she felt, that her hopes, her joy, her happiness, were conjured away from her grasp in some irresistible manner; they were

escaping from her hold, they were dying away; and to all but herself it seemed the simplest thing in the world that it should be so — no one would resent it, or even observe it. Those lips would continue to utter their "dulcet and harmonious sounds;" those eyes would speak or feign a love more ardent and bewitching than her own dared to reveal; that pale cheek would bloom in his presence, and every glance and every gesture tell a tale of passion; while her own childish glee, her own trembling hopes, would wither in the shade like a rose plucked from its stem before the sun has shone upon it, or the morning of life passed away. The scene was sadly changed; the Spirit of mistrust had breathed as he passed on every flower in her path. Like a garden which, on the day of the year's first frost, shows black and shrivelled leaves, where a few hours before bloomed an earthly paradise, so the sweet affections and the kindly sympathies that swayed poor Margaret's heart erewhile were blighted, drooping, perhaps expiring. For the first time in her life she maintained a gloomy silence, while Jealousy and Hatred, those terrific visitors of the soul, hovered in the distance, in dim and shadowy forms, and whispered in her trembling ears their first dark suggestions — their first

foul suspicions. And this lasted — this silent drama unfolded itself — this deepening mystery ran its course — till at the end of about two hours the doors were thrown open, and Lady Donnington and Miss Vincent were announced.

CHAPTER X.

MARGARET started from her chair, and rushed to meet her visitors. She scarcely knew whether their arrival gave her pain or pleasure; but she was glad of anything that changed for the moment a state of feeling that was becoming too acutely painful. Maud kissed her affectionately, and then her eyes wandered in search of Ginevra, who was at that moment advancing towards them. She coldly offered her hand to her, and Margaret perceived with astonishment that a crimson blush had covered her sister's face, and that she seemed to shrink from the piercing glance that Maud turned upon her. Her embarrassment was so visible, that Margaret felt its influence, and also coloured. Maud seemed to enjoy the evident confusion which her presence occasioned, and said a few words about renewing her acquaintance with Miss Leslie, and the manner in which it brought back to her mind their meetings at Genoa. Lady Donnington was so engaged at first in inquiries after every member of Edmund Neville's *family, (for she* was civil, as other people are literary,

or professional, or scientific — it was the business — the enjoyment — the sum total of her existence,) that she had no time to bestow on Ginevra; but in the midst of her concern for a second cousin of Mrs. Warren's, who had had the scarlatina, she suddenly recollected her Italian acquaintance, and shook hands with her repeatedly; but at the same time, with a sort of deprecating sigh, and smothered ejaculation, which seemed to apologise at once for not having seen her before, and for being glad to see her then.

A few words of general conversation passed, and then luncheon was announced, and the whole party moved to the dining-room. Maud watched, like a lynx, every turn of Margaret's countenance, and soon perceived that she was ill at ease, and that her efforts at conversation were not successful. She directed her glances alternately on her, on Ginevra, and on Edmund; and an expression of awakened interest, like that of a dog who has just caught the scent, seemed to sharpen her features and brighten her eyes. As soon as she could escape from the dining-room, she seized Margaret's arm, and led her gently, but forcibly, across the drawing-room into the library, and then into the corner of the remotest couch. When she had fixed her

there, she said in a low, impressive, and inquiring tone —

"Well?"

"Well, I am very glad to see you, Maud; I was afraid the weather was so bad you would not come."

"Are you going to talk to me of the weather?" Maud answered in a tone that was half playful and half impatient; "have you nothing more interesting to tell me?"

"What? — what do you mean?"

"Are you not about to inform me that of all the captivating creatures in the world, your sister is the most irresistible. I am quite prepared for it, I assure you. I hear you are all mad about her; that your father says she is an angel; that Mr. Sydney calls her a saint; and that we shall not have a chance any of us of being even looked at, much less thought of, by anybody, as long as the fair Ginevra remains among us."

"She is very charming," Margaret answered; and there was such a sad tone in her voice as she pronounced the word, that Maud ventured to say, in a manner that might have passed for a mere joke and innocent inquiry,

"Then you have had nothing as yet but the *patte de velours?* You are quite *sous le charme,* I suppose?"

Margaret, like all frank people, detested a hint; and being, moreover, predisposed at that moment to irritation, exclaimed warmly —

"Why really, Maud, I wish you would speak out, or not speak at all. What is the use of beating about the bush, and putting unpleasant ideas into my head, for the sole purpose of plaguing me? As they tell people in the marriage-service, do say what you have to say at once, or 'for ever hold your peace.'"

"O, you have been studying that part of the prayer-book lately? Are you perfect in the responses, and prepared to say, 'I, Margaret, take thee, Edmund —"

"Far from it," exclaimed Margaret, with impetuosity; "there is no question of my marrying Mr. Neville."

"The question may not yet have been asked, but it does not follow that it will not," said Maud, "unless —"

"Unless what?" cried Margaret, whose interest in *the subject got* the better at once of her caution and of *her irritation.*

"Unless," said Maud, "the game should be taken out of your hands, my dear unsuspecting, confiding Margaret, and your *young* and *artless* sister should employ her talents and her charms in that direction. Do not turn away from me, do not look so angry with me. Now, Margaret, do be reasonable. What possible interest can I have in putting you on your guard, except that of saving you from the wretched position of a dupe? I know more of the world than you do, and I also know more, I am sorry to say it, of the character and of the artifices of a coquette, and of the unrelenting manner in which a woman of that description will pursue her object, and gain her end."

"Ginevra cannot be a coquette," Margaret answered, in a hesitating manner. "She is so good, so affectionate, so modest, — at least, I think — I hope so."

"You do not feel sure of it, Margaret — you, who have seen nothing to the contrary; but watch her — remember my advice — *watch her.* I could tell you much on this subject, but I prefer leaving you to your own observations."

"*You know* more of foreigners than I do, Maud,"

said Margaret thoughtfully; "I suppose their manners and ways are always very different from ours."

"In what respect? Cannot you give me an instance of what you mean?"

"I mean that what would not be modest or becoming in an English girl, might, from different habits and customs, be quite natural and proper in a foreigner."

"Why, in married women that might be the case, perhaps; but young ladies abroad are particularly demure, and silent, and proper, and all that sort of thing."

"Well, so she is in some ways, but —"

"But she would not mind walking alone with a gentleman, or writing to him in secret, or —"

As Maud said these words, she carefully watched her companion's countenance, and almost started herself at Margaret's sudden exclamation,

"O Maud! how did you know — how did you guess?"

A look of amused exultation danced in her eyes; and she, in her turn, exclaimed —

"What! I *have* guessed, have I? *You* have had a specimen of your sister's way of going on! and you

have been keeping it to yourself all this time, and only sighing deeply over her many attractions. She has corrupted you already, Margaret, for you would never have been so hypocritical six months ago?"

Margaret coloured deeply at this taunt, and answered with some warmth —

"It is not fair, Maud, to take the words out of my mouth — to cross-question me in this way, and then accuse me of hypocrisy, because I am unwilling to think ill of my sister, or to say what may prejudice others against her."

"O, as to that, my dear child, you need have no scruples; what you can tell me, will only be the simple sequel of what, with my own eyes, I have seen."

"What *do* you mean, Maud? Oh, pray speak out at last, and let me know the worst. You have said too much now to draw back, and you must tell me all you know."

"Well," returned Maud, drawing her lips together, and playing with the trinkets of her chatelaine, "I suppose I am now absolved from my foolish promise to Lucy, not to set you against your sister till you had yourself seen reason to conceive doubts or suspicions about her."

"Oh! I never said I had, Maud. Heaven forbid it; that would be too dreadful!"

"Then what is it you *did* say?" retorted Maud, impatiently; "do not let us go on for ever beating about the bush. What have you seen or heard of your sister that made you ask me that question about foreigners just now, and then, when I spoke of walking alone with a gentleman, made you exclaim, 'O, Maud, how did you know?' Margaret, you had better at once tell me the truth, or I shall suspect something worse, perhaps."

"O no! you must not, indeed; and, perhaps, it was all accidental, and my foolish fancy; but, as you say, I had better tell you the simple truth; but I am very sorry now I ever alluded to it at all. She walked home from chapel last Sunday alone with Mr. Neville, and never said anything to me about it."

"And you are jealous?" said Maud, with a provoking smile.

Margaret coloured, and replied, in a tone of irritation —

"I dislike the appearance of a mystery — that is all; and Ginevra's manner is so unequal, sometimes so very retired, and at other times not quite exactly what

— what I like; I may remark that, without being jealous, as you call it."

"Oh, certainly; and I am glad to hear that you are *not* jealous, for I have not a doubt that your sister has quite made up her mind to captivate Mr. Neville; and with all your beauty and your attractions, you have not a chance with such a thorough-paced coquette as this charming Ginevra. There is only one way of counteracting her devices: — perhaps, if Mr. Neville's eyes were opened to her real character, contempt might guard him against her attractions."

"Contempt!" repeated Margaret; "it would not be easy to despise Ginevra. Oh, Maud, even while I say there is something about her which puzzles me, and causes a sort of vague suspicion to dart through my mind, I am angry with myself for having felt it, and still more for having owned it; perhaps she is an angel of goodness, and I — oh I sometimes think myself too wicked for having had such thoughts."

Poor Margaret looked very unhappy, and it was with a real feeling of interest that Maud Vincent took her hand, and looked into her face as she replied,

"My dear girl, do not add to your distress by unnecessary self-reproaches. You have only vaguely dis-

cerned in your sister's manner and conduct what *must* be repugnant to your own sense of right, and what *I* have known long ago was the case. I have had the most unequivocal evidence of the extraordinary contrasts between her apparent reserve and her real character."

Margaret started, and looked anxiously at her companion.

"You know already," continued Maud, "that we were at Genoa at the same time she was, and that we saw a great deal of her. *I* never liked her from the first; there was something so cold and uncertain in her manner, and she never seemed at her ease with me; but Lucy took one of her violent *engouements* for her, and I never heard anything from morning to night but praises of Ginevra Leslie, and exclamations about her beauty, her goodness, and her talents. They used to read together, and walk together, and Lucy, who had always had rather a fancy for Catholicism, was quite taken up with her new friend, and went with her to convents, and hospitals, and churches, and found out, *accidentally*, all sorts of beautiful traits of charity and self-denial which this wonderful model of perfection practised in secret. I hid my diminished head, and began to feel rather ashamed of my prejudice against

her; when, alas! for Lucy and her idol, I too made a discovery of secret doings of a very different character. One morning that Frederic and I had walked out before breakfast, we passed before the church of the Capuchins, and, attracted by the music, we went in, and standing near a column, watched the service for a few minutes. Among the poorer people who were kneeling before the altar, was your sister; and certainly, I never saw any one *appear* more devout than she did. She seemed to pray with her whole heart and soul, and while the beads glided through her fingers, her eyes were fixed with an intensity of supplication I never saw in any eyes before, on the crucifix over the altar. I could not take my eyes off her, and I observed her do a very kind thing during that service. There was a little girl kneeling by her on the cold marble, (for there were neither chairs nor benches within reach), who looked very ill and weak, and leaned against her for support; I felt touched, I own, when I saw your sister, instead of shrinking from the dirty little creature, take her in her arms, and hold her there during the rest of the mass, while she remained kneeling herself, and her attitude was so beautiful, that I was not surprised when Frederic touched my arm, and pointed to her

and then to a picture of the Virgin and Child, which hung near us, and whispered, 'How like!' As we came out, Frederic said to me, 'Do let us ask Miss Leslie to breakfast with us; it will please Lucy so much.' I made no objection, and we accordingly went up to her as she was coming down the steps, and proposed that she should return home with us. She thanked me, but declined with that gentle manner, and that peculiar smile which you know so well, and which is always to me so suspicious; I cannot bear people who *never* look cross or angry. Well, Fred. persisted in pressing her to come, and she still refused, without assigning any reason. At last, she said something about being expected at home, and looked quite uncomfortable when Fred. (with, I own, not exquisite tact) kept on urging the point. At last, she wished us good-bye in a decisive manner, and left us. Well, instead of going straight home, as we had intended to do, we extended our walk towards the Acqua Sola. It so happened, that when we reached the Villa Negri I missed my bracelet, and supposing that I must have dropped it either in or just outside the church, we turned back, and retraced our steps. As we passed through one of the trellised alleys of the Acqua Sola,

who should I see through the vine branches which separated us from the little fountain gardens on our left, but Ginevra, seated on a bench, not very far from us, in earnest conversation with a man whose back was turned to me. Frederic wanted to hurry on, but I confess to you that curiosity, and a feeling stronger than curiosity, rooted me to the spot. I had been persuaded all along that that extraordinary perfection which was lauded before me from morning to night, was not quite so consistent as my family wished to make out, and I was not sorry that Frederic, who had always joined with Lucy in exclaiming against my ill-nature whenever I had given a hint of the sort, should have ocular demonstration that the reserve and modesty they had so much extolled was not *always* at least, the order of the day. My dear Margaret, I hardly like to distress you by telling you the whole truth, but as I have said so much, I had better keep nothing from you; and after all, anything is better than to be deceived. Not only did I see Ginevra look up into her companion's face with an expression of countenance that left no doubt as to the nature of their conversation, but I also saw that her hand was clasped in his, and he frequently pressed it to his lips; and that before they parted,

which they did an instant afterwards, with some precipitation, he put his arm round her waist and kissed her repeatedly. He darted away in one direction, with his hat slouched over his face, so that I could not discern his features. She remained an instant apparently absorbed in thought, and then starting up from her seat, walked rapidly towards the steps of the Acqua Sola. At the end of the alley she came in sight of us. She turned as pale as death, and hurried on without speaking or looking towards us. Since that day we heard several things about her which served to confirm the impression which this incident had produced upon us. She was known to carry on a secret correspondence, and to have resorted to various expedients for concealing the letters she received, and those she sent, from Mrs. Warren's observation. There were some very bad stories about her, but as I cannot vouch for their truth, I will not pain you by repeating them; mamma begged us to avoid as much as possible any intimacy with her, and a short time afterwards we left Genoa."

Margaret, who had listened to this long account without speaking, and with a contracted brow and flushed cheek, suggested, that although what Maud

had *accidentally* seen (she laid a slightly ironical stress on the word) was shocking and painful in the extreme, still, she felt inclined to hope that her sister was attached to an Italian, and one perhaps whom she might have known from childhood; and that, in that case, however blameable her conduct might have been in carrying on a clandestine intercourse, it would, perhaps, admit of some excuse. Maud looked very incredulous, and adverted to some circumstances which militated, in her opinion, against this charitable supposition, and ended by saying,

"Well, my dear Margaret, if you have seen nothing in your sister's manners and conduct which you dislike or disapprove, 'Mettez que je n'ai rien dit,' as French people say. I do not wish to force you to concur in my unalterable opinion on the subject; of course, if Ginevra is attached to an Italian lover, there can be no fear of her endeavouring to gain the affections of any one else."

"But," exclaimed Margaret with impatience, (for she felt the full force of Maud's insinuations), "but can she really be a miserable hypocrite? Does she feign to serve God, to love goodness, to honour virtue? Is there no reality in her faith, in her piety, in her af-

fections? O, Maud, she cannot be so disgustingly wicked!"

"My dear child, it does not follow because your sister is a coquette, and, as I sometimes think, more than a coquette, that she absolutely feigns the sentiments she seems at times to possess. I dare say she has a sort of half scenic, half romantic religion, which is very common among Catholics, and which has nothing to do with morality, and I have no doubt that she is very good to the poor, and all that sort of thing; but her religion teaches that you can make up for every kind of sin by good works of an easy description, and that if you confess and get absolution, you may feel quite satisfied, and go on just as before; so you see that Catholics can be very religious and very immoral at the same time, without being exactly hypocrites."

"I see," said Margaret, thoughtfully; "that accounts for it all."

The oft-repeated slander had been uttered; the falsehood which the lives of a thousand saints have disproved, — which the voice of the preacher, the pen of the learned, the experience of millions, and miracles of grace, and prodigies of penitence, daily contradict, —

had been brought to bear, and Margaret, sighing deeply, carried away with her, as that conversation ended, an unfavourable impression of her sister's character, and a most mistaken view of that sister's faith.

In the mean time Ginevra had been conversing too. Lady Donnington had gone up to Mrs. Thornton's room, and the rest of the company had left the drawing-room, with the exception of Mr. Warren, who was looking listlessly out of a window, near which Ginevra was working. A noise of horse's feet on the road below the terrace made her raise her eyes, and she saw Edmund Neville on horseback, galloping very fast, but curbing with a strong hand the fiery and foaming horse that was bounding under him. As he shot like an arrow past the window, Mr. Warren exclaimed —

"There he goes. Reckless and headstrong as ever! Ah, Signora, your pretty little sister will have much ado to keep her captive in order, even if she succeeds in bringing him to her feet."

"Are you in earnest?" said his companion, suddenly turning towards him and looking him full in the face.

"*I* am — but I do not think *he* is, though he certainly said something like it yesterday."

"It is impossible," said Ginevra, and there was a tremulous movement in her hands, as she rapidly passed her needle through the canvas.

"It is very undesirable he should marry so young," continued Mr. Warren, "but by no means impossible that he is thinking of it. My agent told me that it was reported all over the county that he is about to marry your sister. I don't believe it myself, but they say he will behave very ill to her if he does not, and between ourselves, Signorina, I must say that she looks head over ears in love with him already."

"No, no," exclaimed his companion in a hurried manner. "No, you must be wrong. It cannot be; but — but, you should speak to your nephew; you should tell him what people say. You will not let this go on; you can save much misery by speaking to him at once."

"Oh; so I suppose Miss Margaret Leslie has confided to you her inclination for my too captivating nephew."

"You are quite mistaken," replied Ginevra coldly, but in an instant returning to the charge, she added, "you promise, don't you, to speak to — your nephew?"

"But perhaps he really does mean to marry your sister, and if so, would it not be a pity to interfere and spoil such a match?"

Ginevra was silent, and Mr. Warren continued, —

"My nephew would do well to marry an heiress, for rich as he will be, his means will never equal his extravagance. I happen to know that he is deeply involved in debt already."

"Has he not a kind father?" asked Ginevra, without raising her eyes.

"Kind enough when he is not thwarted, but intractable in some cases; full of crotchets, and prejudiced to excess. He had a great antipathy to me at one time, but I won his heart when I was last in England by attending the meetings at Exeter Hall."

"What is Exeter Hall?" asked Ginevra, who had heard of Exeter 'Change, and supposed one of Mr. Neville's peculiarities might be a taste for wild beasts.

"A place, my fair Signora, where we thank God that we are not as other men are — that is, deluded papists like yourself. Do not be angry — you know well I am no fierce Protestant like my brother-in-law, but it was necessary to convince him that I had not fallen a prey to Popery, the phantom that haunts him

by day and by night. By the way, you will be a sad obstacle to Edmund's marriage with your sister. A Catholic sister-in-law! the very idea will make his hair stand on end!"

Mr. Warren sauntered out of the room, humming an opera air, and when the door closed behind him Ginevra's needle fell from her hands; her eye rested on the open book which Edmund had left on the table, then on her own hand. A few tears rolled slowly down her face; she wiped them hastily away, and began to work again, while her brow contracted with an expression of deep and painful thought. She was roused by the sound of wheels, and glancing at the window, saw Lady Donnington's carriage drive away. She passed her hand once across her brow, drew a deep breath, and then perceived Margaret and Maud, who had entered the room together, and were advancing towards her. She gave a slight start, but quickly recovering herself, spoke to them in her usual gentle manner, and asked after Lucy.

"You will see her to-morrow," Maud answered; "she will come with my father and mother, and we all remain till Saturday."

"I am so glad of that," exclaimed Mrs. Warren,

who had followed them into the room, "and especially that I find you mean to be very gay this week, Miss Leslie."

"O yes," replied Margaret, in an absent and dejected tone; "so very gay."

"On Thursday there is to be a ball," said Maud, "and on Friday we shall act charades. Who do you expect to-morrow, Margaret, besides my people?"

"Sir Charles D'Arcy, and my uncle, John Thornton."

"You must display all your talents on the occasion, Signora," said Mrs. Warren, turning to Ginevra; "you must sing, and act, and compose."

"O, of course," interrupted Maud; "you will be the prima donna, and *act* to perfection. I wonder what part would suit you best?"

Ginevra's lip was quivering, and her head was bent over her frame to hide the workings of her countenance.

"We ought to have a scene from 'She Stoops to Conquer,'" Maud continued, "or, to aspire still higher, from 'All 's Well that *ends* Well.' The very name of that play is a moral."

Walter, who had taken up a book and sat down by the table, raised his eyes, and looked with sur-

prise at the group before him. Ginevra was silent, and seemed unable to smile or to speak. Maud was standing before the fire and watching her, with an expression of half amused and half spiteful interest, and Margaret, his darling Margaret, with swollen eyes, a curling lip, and contracted brow, leaned against the chimney, and looked from one to the other in a quick and restless manner. Mrs. Warren seemed chiefly engrossed in ransacking her memory for charades, and now and then announced that she had found the very word they wanted, but it was generally rejected as old, imperfect, or impossible to be got up. This went on for a while, and then Ginevra folded her work, drew her shawl round her shoulders, and glided out of the room. Maud followed her with her eyes, and then whispered to Margaret —

"I am perfectly certain that she will contrive to see Mr. Neville before dressing time; I would bet anything that she does. Do you ever go to her room before dinner?"

"At six o'clock she likes to arrange my hair, and I always go to her then."

"If you were to go at five, you would not find her."

"No, she is almost always with my father at that hour."

Maud looked disappointed, and for some time the silence was unbroken, except by the rustling of Walter's newspaper, and Mrs. Warren's murmured cogitations.

"'Rose-Mary' — no, that 's too old; 'Bull-Finch' — can't be acted; 'Ivan-hoe' — 'hoe' — what could be done for 'hoe?' Mr. Warren, how could we act '*hoe?*'"

This question was addressed to her husband, who had just come in, and was warming himself, with his back to the fire.

"Oh, very easily, I dare say. Just read that."

He tossed a letter into her lap, which she took up negligently, but after reading the first lines, her whole attention seemed riveted, and she looked up two or three times into his face with an anxious and inquiring expression. At that moment the door was opened, and Colonel Leslie asked,

"Is Ginevra here?"

"No," cried Walter.

"She is out," said Mr. Warren; "I met her just now on the West Terrace."

Maud looked at Margaret, who remained in gloomy silence, with her eyes fixed on the fire. She drew near to her and whispered, "Can't you tell Mr. Sydney to look for her?"

Anything of a plot or a contrivance was so foreign to Margaret's nature, that she shook her head, and said nothing, and a moment afterwards, disgusted with Ginevra, with Maud, and with herself, she slowly crossed the room to leave it. Walter opened the door for her, and whispered, "Margaret, what *is* the matter with you; are you ill or unhappy?"

"Both," she exclaimed, and snatching away her hand which he had taken, she rushed to her own room, bolted the door, and cried bitterly.

At six o'clock a restless feeling of anxiety and curiosity would not suffer her to omit her usual visit to Ginevra; when she entered her room, her bonnet and cloak were lying on a chair near the door; she hastily touched them as she passed, and their heavy dampness proved that they had been only just taken off. Flowers were lying as usual on the table; she took her accustomed place, and Ginevra began plaiting her hair. Neither of them spoke, but once Margaret started as a hot tear fell on her brow. It was silently kissed away,

and strange to say, in that moment she felt no anger or resentment, only a deep oppressive sense of misery. She hid her face in her hands, and her tears flowed in silence. Ginevra knelt by her side, and threw her arms round her. Grace opened the door, and both sisters started like frightened fawns; without a word or a glance, Margaret rushed out of the room, and while she finished her dressing, tried to collect her thoughts. She felt as if there were two different Margarets within her, and two Ginevras near her. The one who listened to Maud, and suspected her sister, and the one who had wept with that sister just now; and the Ginevra that Maud described, and that she dreaded and disliked, could it be that gentle girl whose tears had fallen on her brow, and whose lips had been so softly pressed on her cheek?

The dinner-bell rang before she had finished dressing, and as she was hurrying down stairs, she passed Edmund Neville and Mr. Warren, who were speaking eagerly to each other, without noticing her approach. The latter was talking very fast, and she only distinguished these words: "It had occurred to me before, and all I can say is, that you may reckon upon me, and the sooner you go the better." Margaret took

her place at dinner between Walter and the clergyman of the parish. The words she had overheard sounded in her ears, and she kept repeating to herself, "The sooner you go the better." Was Edmund going? — where? — when? One lingering hope remained. Was it possible that he was about to solicit his father's consent? She glanced at his face. It was gloomy and sad. Not once did his eyes seek her's; when he raised them, they invariably turned towards her sister, but with an expression of gloom and resentment that almost amounted to fierceness. Ginevra was as pale as a sheet, and Margaret felt bewildered and frightened, but not jealous, as in the morning. She resolutely avoided responding to the glances which Maud was directing towards her, and as soon as it was possible, she gave the signal of withdrawal; as she stood by the door to let all the other ladies pass, Edmund, who had opened it, bent forward when Ginevra went by, and slipped a note into her hand. He had not seen that Margaret was behind, and she only remarked as she followed her sister into the drawing-room, that she seemed ready to faint, and grasped the back of a chair for support. *She would* not for worlds have revealed to Maud what *she had just* seen; an unutterable pity seemed to take

possession of her soul, and as her sister left the room with faltering steps, she felt no irritation, nothing but a vague foreboding of evil for herself and for others. Maud, repulsed in some attempts at conversation, seized on a book; Mrs. Warren, contrary to her usual habit, was abstracted and silent; Mrs. Thornton, alone unruffled and undisturbed, maintained that sort of uninterrupted small-talk, which, unprovoked and unrewarded, pursued the senseless tenor of its way, through all the varied accidents of life. Later in the evening, when most of the company had assembled in the music-room, Maud began talking of the ball and of the charades, and making various plans about them. She had just allotted a part to Edmund, when Mr. Warren interrupted her by saying —

"Do you know that he talks of running away? I believe we are actually to lose him to-morrow."

"What, Mr. Neville, is it possible?" Maud exclaimed; and Margaret and Ginevra raised their eyes at the same moment.

"I have had letters from Ireland, which oblige me to go home," he answered briefly.

"And when shall you settle at Darrell Court?" *asked Walter.*

"That depends entirely upon circumstances. Perhaps very soon — perhaps *never*."

Maud looked at Margaret, but she was sick at heart, and did not return the glance. The approaching days, which she had at one time looked forward to with so much pleasure, presented to her now the most irksome prospect, and she felt a vague wish that something might happen to stop a course of proceedings that seemed empty folly when all the spirit that had actuated its conception had disappeared. She wondered that rational beings could dance, and act, and play like a parcel of children. "Was life given us for such purposes?" she mentally exclaimed; and then she thought that life, as it appeared to her at that moment, was a sad, a dreary, an unprofitable boon — dim and colourless, like the landscape on which the sun has ceased to shine — long as a tale whose interest is exhausted — insipid as a fruit that has lost its savour. Engrossed by her own thoughts, she scarcely attended to a single word that was said to her, and when asked to play, she went mechanically to the piano-forte, and went through a sonata without once looking about her, *or uttering* a word in answer to the compliments that *were addressed* to her; for she played well, and the

nervous uneasiness of her mind seemed to give strength to her fingers and expression to her touch. She had just risen to return to her work, when the butler walked up to Edmund Neville, and said to him eagerly —

"Sir, your dog is here. He has found you out."

A scuffle was heard at the door, and a large mastiff of the St. Bernard breed burst into the room, and rushed to his master with all the impetuosity of joy and exulting recognition.

"Oh, what a magnificent creature!" exlaimed Maud Vincent, and bent down to caress him. He growled at her, and she withdrew alarmed. Margaret and Mrs. Warren also vainly tried to approach him, and Edmund called him towards the door, when, suddenly leaving his master, the dog approached Ginevra, smelt her dress an instant, and then uttering a low joyful cry, jumped upon her, licked her face and hands, and laid his large head on her knees. She caressed him an instant, and then pushed him gently away. Edmund said, aloud —

"I suppose, Signora, that old Bruno acknowledges you for his countrywoman?"

The colour rushed into her cheeks; perhaps these words brought to her mind her own snowy Alps, and

the Italian valleys at their feet, for she snatched the dog in her arms, and laid her face on his shaggy neck. Twice she repeated his name with a kind of passionate fondness, as if she lingered over the syllables and fixed them in her memory.

"You should *improviser* some stanzas, Signora," observed Mr. Warren, "in honour of the dog who has paid you so signal a compliment."

General exclamations broke forth in support of Mr. Warren's suggestion. Edmund at the same time said something in a low voice to old Bruno, who had returned to him, and Ginevra's eyes fixed themselves upon him with an earnest steady gaze that seemed to make him uneasy; the colour deepened in his cheek, and leaning against the chimney, he hid his face with his arm. Still her eyes followed him, as if unconsciously; but in a few seconds she fixed them on the dog, who was now lying at her feet, and in a low deep voice, whose accents fell on the ear like the whisperings of an Æolian harp, she repeated some stanzas in Italian, the sense of which may thus be rendered in English: —

"Friend of the wanderer! Guide in the storm! In thy native mountains thou art wont to seek the linger-

ing life that is ebbing away in the grasp of death. The voice of the torrent, the fall of the avalanche, the smooth and fatal whiteness of the deep valley, cannot blind thy instinct or deceive thy sympathies.

"Brave dog of the St. Bernard! Tried friend of the wanderer! When the shades of night have closed about him, and the precipice is yawning at his feet, and the peaks of the Alps, in their snowy shrouds, hang over him like ghosts, and he gives himself up for lost, it is then thy familiar bark, thy warm breath, thy strength, and thy tenderness, revive him. O, thou friend in need! O, thou guide in darkness! But is it given to thee, too, to read the tearless eye, and discern the struggles of the soul under the smooth surface of apparent calmness? Does some strange instinct tell thee where a human heart is throbbing in silence, like the torrents of thine own Alps, when an icy prison binds them?

"The first breath of summer will burst *their* chains; *they* will spring forth, exulting into life, and gladden the valleys with their cataracts of foam, their rainbow colours and their deep songs of joy. The Spring must come to them; the sweet breeze of the

South must waken them again to life and to liberty; but the whisperings of hope — when will they reach the heart that is waxing cold in its misery? The sunshine of love — when will it melt the icy prison where the soul is struggling in silence?

"Thy kind eyes, thy warm breath, cannot do it; thy strength is vain, thy pity is useless. It lies not with thee to comfort the sick at heart, or to revive the spirit which man has blighted. Go back to thy mountains, brave dog of the St. Bernard; go to the snow-drifts, and bid them yield their victims; call to the abyss, and bid it give up its dead; seek for life in the glaciers, and carry warmth to the perishing: but come not in thy impotent love, and in thy vain compassion, to speak of hope to those whom hope is forsaking, or of joy to those whose joy is departed."

The voice of the speaker was hushed, and seemed still to vibrate in the hearts of her hearers. Her attitude did not change; her eyes were still fixed on the dog at her feet, who was licking her hand gently, as if afraid of disturbing her. Mrs. Warren fidgetted about, and tried to say something in praise of the *verses.* Mrs. Thornton, who had not understood them, *declared it* was wonderful, but that she wished it had

been done in English. Mr. Warren, Walter, and Maud, all seemed to feel that there was something in this scene beyond what met the eye. Walter drew near to Margaret, and, as if by accident, he took hold of her hand, and pressed it. Ginevra was the first to move; she walked slowly towards the door, but stopped before she reached it, and looked back towards the place where Edmund was standing. For the first time that evening he looked at her; their eyes met; he saw an expression of such intense imploring entreaty in her's, that he seemed to forget himself, and started forward as if to go to her; but he stopped, and sitting carelessly on the music-stool as he passed the piano-forte, he laid his hand negligently on the keys, and played a few notes of a melancholy and expressive air. The colour returned to Ginevra's cheek as the sounds reached her; a slow faint smile flitted over her face; once more their eyes met, and then she left the room; while Edmund, seizing a newspaper, threw himself upon a couch, and hid his face with it. Maud went to the piano-forte, and after running her fingers along the keys, she called Margaret, and said —

"Have you ever heard the famous air in '*Guido e Ginevra?*'" and she played the same notes that Ed-

mund had just imperfectly, but distinctly, rendered; and then as Margaret stood by with an anxious and bewildered countenance, she added —

"The words are as touching as the tune;" and she sang, in French, the well-known air which ends with these oft-repeated words:

"Je reviendrai pour dire encore, le nom si doux de Ginevra."

Margaret went to her room, and sat down by the fire, with her face buried in her hands. She had not spoken to Edmund, or even looked at him, as she had left the library; and it was only now that she remembered that if he went early the next morning, she should not see him again. It had not occurred to her that this was possible, and a sharp pain shot through her heart at the idea. Her maid came into undress her, and commanding her voice as well as she could, she inquired at what hour Mr. Neville had ordered his carriage.

"At six," Grace replied, and Margaret's heart sank within her. A moment afterwards there was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Dalton put in her head, and said — "Here is a note, my dear, which Mr. Neville asked me to give you. He was so sorry not to have *seen you leave* the room, as he wished to say good-*bye to you.*"

Margaret took the note with a trembling hand, but she could not open it before others. She dismissed Grace, she kissed Mrs. Dalton, shut the door, pressed the note to her lips, and burst into tears. She dared not open it; a faint hope still flickered in her mind, like the expiring light of the candle which Grace had just extinguished, and left on the table. With a superstitious anxiety she watched it rise, and fall, and sink as with a hopeless despondency, and then shoot up again with a kind of fierce resolution, and then burn dimly and faintly, and then throw out two or three sparks, as if it strove by a last effort of feeble strength to keep off its approaching end. "If it hold on but one second more," thought Margaret, as she broke the seal of the note in her hand, "I shall not despair." Her fingers trembled, and the inclosure stuck to the envelope; once more a spark gleamed in the blackened wick, but disappeared before her eyes had glanced over the now unfolded paper, and read the courteous but common-place farewell which extinguished the last lingering hope of her aching heart. She threw it into the fire, but snatched the shrivelling paper before the flames had entirely consumed it, and with a sort of *faint pleasure* perceived that the writing was not yet

all destroyed — the signature was still visible. She smoothed the paper, folded it, and cried bitterly. It was a great trial, and it was her first trial. She had never parted before from any one she loved, and she was afraid of her own feelings when she should wake the next day, and remember that Edmund was gone. She could not rest, she could not even attempt to lie down; but heaping fresh coals on the fire, she sat on, with her eyes fixed on the French clock on the chimney-piece, sometimes clenching her hands as if in anger, sometimes with the tears rolling down her cheeks, and her head reposing on the back of the arm-chair, like a child exhausted with crying. The clock struck five, and she heard a sound of steps in the passage above her room, like somebody walking very lightly. In a few seconds' time she heard a door closed in a slow and cautious manner at the end of the gallery on which her own room opened, and then everything was quiet again. A moment afterwards Margaret started up in her chair, and exclaimed to herself, "O shame, shame!" and then again buried her face in her hands. Unconnected words and sentences fell from her lips; a strange contest seemed to be taking place within her. Once, overcome by fatigue, she fell asleep, and then woke up

and cried out, "O no, Maud; O no." And an instant afterwards, she said, as if musing over the words — "Worse than a coquette?" The clock struck six; she was getting very restless and feverish, and began to walk up and down the room, and then, in a few minutes, she opened the door, and looked down the dark gallery. At the farthest end of it a speck of light was visible; it was from the chink of a door; it was scarcely perceptible, but it was there, and the door was Ginevra's. "O that I dared open it," she exclaimed, "that I dared burst into that room, and kneel to her whom I wrong so grievously, whom I suspect —"

The handle of the door on which her eyes were fixed softly turned, and then she heard again the sound of steps, and her soul sickened within her; she thought she knew the step, she had so often watched its approach. It had once been music in her ears; and now, that slow and cautious tread sounded like the knell — not of her happiness, that seemed gone already, — but of all her future peace of mind.

"I will speak to her," she exclaimed. "It is a dream, perhaps, and a horrid one. To see her will *dispel it.*"

She crossed the gallery with trembling steps — she paused at the door. The sound of deep and stifled sobs met her ears — she opened the door; Ginevra was on her knees, her hair streaming over her face, and her whole frame quivering with emotion. At the sound of the opening door, she started up, and extended her arms wildly, pushing back the hair from her face, and uttering a sort of cry of hope and surprise, and some Italian word of endearment. Her eyes were blinded with tears; but in an instant she recognised Margaret, and said, "Sister!" in so gentle, and utterly mournful a tone, that it sounded like a cry for mercy. Margaret stood transfixed, bewildered, unable to collect her thoughts; but her eyes fell at that moment on a travelling fur glove that lay on the carpet close to the door. She knew it well, and a tumultuous tide of passion rushed over her soul, sent the crimson blood into her cheek, and heaved in her swelling and indignant breast. With flashing eyes and curling lip she held it out to Ginevra, who took it mechanically, and pressed her other hand on her throat, as if to subdue the convulsive agitation of her frame.

"*What* do you wish? What do you want, sister?" *she asked*, as if she did not know what she said.

At that moment the sound of carriage wheels was heard, and both sisters started.

"Yes," exclaimed Margaret, in a loud voice, as the sound died away in the distance — "yes, he is going! he goes! and would to Heaven he had never known you or me; would to God he had never set his eyes upon us, and brought misery to me — and to you. Oh! what has he brought to you? I know not — I dare not — I cannot think or speak; but guilty, very guilty you must be, Ginevra — for darkness, and silence, and shame have attended your actions. A false innocence has been on your brow, and a false virtue on your tongue. You have deceived me with every feature in your face, and with every accent of your voice. He is gone; yes, thank Heaven! he is gone; but peace, and hope, and trust, are gone too, for ever gone, from this, my once happy home. O, may he never return! May my eyes never behold him again! May his own conscience, if deceit and treachery have not for ever hardened it, torment and punish him for the misery he has brought upon me, — aye, and upon you," she continued, (as Ginevra faintly murmured, "For God's sake — for mercy's sake, do not curse him, Margaret,") — "*you, my fallen*, my most unhappy sister. O Ginevra!

Ginevra! was it for this that you were made so beautiful, so highly gifted, so captivating, to be only so infinitely vile. Ginevra, I could hate you for the injury you have done me, if I did not pity you from my soul. You, who know so well, who can talk so well of pure, and noble, and holy things, you cannot be hardened — you cannot be so dead to all feeling —"

Was it the calm of death; was it the deadness of the soul that made those pale blue eyes so clear and mild, in their meek and most expressive sadness? Was the look of tenderness with which she watched the excited and quivering features of her indignant sister, another piece of well-acted deceit; and the convulsive energy with which she pressed to her heart the small crucifix she wore round her neck, another proof of hollow formalism or miserable hypocrisy?

"Sister," she said at last, when, exhausted by her own vehemence, Margaret fell on a chair with her face hid in her hands — "sister, you must think ill, very ill of me; I cannot expect, or even wish that you should not. No, Margaret, always shrink from the very first approach to evil or deceit. Shrink from it as from a poisonous serpent, and abhor it whenever and wherever you meet with it. But be merciful to the sinner, while

you condemn the sin! Believe that, notwithstanding the strongest and most conclusive appearances of guilt, there may be — excuses, perhaps, or — bear with me, Margaret, listen to me — dangers, trials, Margaret!" she continued, drawing nearer to her sister. "I am still very young, and though I seem sometimes so calm and so strong, I can hardly bear the burthen that is laid upon me. I do not ask you to help me; for none can do that but God. I do not ask you to forgive me, for I may not now tell you how much or how little you have to forgive; but spare me, pray for me; pray that the acute sufferings which day by day I endure, may expiate whatever has been guilty in my life; and, O sister, this is my most ardent prayer, that I may one day hear from your lips that you are happy again."

Margaret waved her hand impatiently; Ginevra wrung her own, and gazed upon her as if she would have read into her soul. She then stood before her, and, in a tone of voice gentle, but firm, addressed her thus —

"Margaret, it signifies little whether it be through my fault or through my misfortune that your hopes, and what you now call your happiness, are destroyed. You *never* can be Edmund Neville's wife; and *never*,

even in your most secret thoughts, must you allow yourself to think of him as a husband or as a lover. I care not what you think of me; I care not now what impression you carry away with you, nor how you treat me in future, nor how you speak of me to others; but this conviction you *must* carry with you when you leave this room, and never lose it again as you value *all* that you believe me to have lost."

Margaret started up, caught her sister's hands, and, with an eagerness amounting to violence, exclaimed —

"Tell me what you mean. When you wept and kissed my hand just now I thought you guilty. Now you speak with a strange audacity, and I could almost fancy you to be innocent. If you are so, speak; speak, Ginevra. Tell me any tale you choose, and I will believe it, or else let me leave the room and never trust in any one again."

"Go," said Ginevra, calmly and solemnly, "go, and never ask me again to speak of myself. Only remember my last words, and lay them to your heart. Our paths of duty are different, and though we may live together, if that even be allowed, we must never forget *that* an invisible barrier has risen between us, which *you cannot* — and I dare not — remove. M., with a

great patience and a holy trust, you will bear with me, and suspend hard thoughts and abstain from harsh words, it will be a great and wonderful effort of virtue; and hereafter, my sister, you will be glad to think that you did not break a bruised reed — but if you cannot, then let God's will be done. Be it trial, or be it punishment, I am ready to receive at your hands far more misery than I have inflicted upon you. Only" — she stopped, hesitated, clasped her hands in supplication, and then, with a burst of such agony as she had not given way to before, exclaimed — "only, only spare my father!"

Margaret held out her hand without looking at her; but as she was leaving the room, she returned impetuously, flung herself into her sister's arms, and both wept with uncontrollable emotion; and when these two fair creatures parted, it was with a heavier weight of sorrow on their spirits than such young hearts are often doomed to endure.

CHAPTER XI.

When Margaret awoke on the following day, after two or three hours of restless and feverish sleep, she felt totally unequal to the labours of the day — that heavy labour especially of entertaining friends, and disguising her own feelings; but the recollection that others would connect her illness, if she admitted it, with Neville's departure, gave her strength to rouse herself, and to surmount her dread of encountering the eyes of her family, the presence of her sister, and above all, the flippant remarks and sharp interrogatory glances of Maud Vincent. As she passed the hall clock, she started at perceiving how late she was, and hurried into the breakfast-room. Ginevra was in her place making tea, and looking perfectly calm, though paler than usual. She silently put within her sister's reach whatever she wanted for her breakfast; and at the moment that Mrs. Thornton was about to cross-question her grand-daughter about her looks, which certainly were not satisfactory, she diverted that lady's attention by a well-timed inquiry about the efficacy of some ho-

mœopathic powders administered the day before to the schoolmaster's wife. Maud was watching Margaret, partly from curiosity, and partly from real interest; she could not form any conjecture that satisfied her as to the state of things which Edmund had left behind him, and she was longing to be alone with her, that they might talk over his departure, and form plans for circumventing the enemy, as in her own mind she designated Ginevra. But this was not easily achieved; when they moved into the drawing-room, both the sisters sat at the same table, and Maud's efforts to induce Margaret to withdraw elsewhere with her were vain. She had fetched her pencils and her colours and began painting some figures in her sketch-book with a resolute application that baffled all attempts at conversation. Maud grew provoked, and asked Walter Sydney if he had seen Mr. Neville before he started. He said he had not; he was off by six o'clock, he believed: and he too looked at Margaret. No blush was on her cheek, but her lip slightly quivered, and she gave, perhaps unconsciously, an expression of scorn to the face she was painting. Mr. Warren came into the room at that moment, and after taking up a newspaper for an instant, and playing with the ears of Ebro for

another, he came up to the table, and said to Ginevra "Put on your things, Signorina, and come and look at the skaiters in the park." To Margaret's surprise Ginevra instantly consented, and left the room to prepare for walking. It was a glorious winter's day, and the sun was shining brightly. Mr. Warren was waiting on the steps of the terrace, and when Ginevra appeared at the hall-door, and walked towards him, he said to himself, "Now for it," like a man who is going to pull the string of a shower-bath. She joined him, and they descended towards the river, where several of the servants and a number of village boys were sliding and skaiting with some little skill, and a great deal of merriment. They reached the pretty bridge at the lower end of the park, and wrapped up in fur cloaks they sat down on the arch to watch the scene below. Mr. Warren pulled some of the grass from between the stones, knocked about the loose bricks, hummed, whistled, seemed embarrassed in short — a strange feeling to him; he had not been embarrassed when he went up for his degree at Oxford, nor when he made his maiden speech in the House of Commons, which *he soon gave* up, as too fatiguing; nor on that event*ful occasion* when he proposed to Mrs. Warren, which

he did in so abrupt and off-hand a manner, that she had first answered, "No, thank you," not comprehending it was the offer of his hand she rejected. But he *was* (in his way at least) embarrassed now; and said, without looking at his companion —

"You know that Edmund has been speaking to me of your affairs? It is a difficult business, Signorina."

"Can you help us?" she asked in a low voice.

"Only by telling you the exact truth."

"Speak," she said again, and clasped her hands with a nervous contraction.

"That my brother-in-law will ever consent to your marriage is as great an impossibility as that this tree should walk across the river and take up its position on the opposite hill. Upon my word, I should as soon expect the one event to occur as the other. He is the most conscientious, the most prejudiced, and the most obstinate of men. He was *sworn* never to admit a Catholic into his house. He has made various sacrifices to the fulfilment of that oath. He has neglected claims which might have been established to considerable property, from a determination not to have any dealings with Catholics; so you may imagine *what chance* there is of his consenting to the marriage

of his only son with a person of that religion. No, I will not deceive you on that point. If Edmund should persist in marrying a Catholic, he will be disinherited, without the shadow of a doubt; and I must also add, in fairness to him, he *cannot*, for your sake as well as his own, run such a risk, or rather incur that certain penalty. Brought up as he has been in the most extravagant manner, fonder of luxury than any human being ever was, accustomed to gratify every whim as it arises, head over ears in debt already, and disinclined or unfit for every profession — by urging him to such a step, you would be plunging him and yourself into hopeless beggary; you wonld destroy every prospect of happiness, nay, of respectability, for him, and act as his worst and most cruel enemy. As you care for him, as you value his peace of mind, his reputation, his honour, Signora, you must give him up."

"And if I *cannot* give him up?" she repeated slowly, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

"Why, in that case, I am sorry to say so, but he really must give you up."

"Did *he* say so? Did *he* say *that?*" asked Ginevra, *grasping Mr.* Warren's arm.

"*No, but I* say so, and you must feel it," he

added coldly. She released her hold, and hid her face in her hands.

"I am vexed, my dear Miss Leslie, that you take it so much to heart, but indeed it is inevitable."

She raised her eyes one moment, and her lips murmured "God give me patience." Mr. Warren looked at her, and seemed struck with the expression of agony in her face. He pitied her, and said in a low voice —

"There would be *one* alternative, one resource."

"What?"

"A change of religion," he said, without looking at her, and affecting to gaze through his spy-glass at the skaiters below

For an instant her eyes flashed fire, but a holier expression soon succeeded that first glance of indignation, and she gently but resolutely uttered the word "*never*."

"You will get accustomed to the idea."

"Heaven forbid!" she replied.

"Why, if you could be convinced, what a good thing it would be. Cannot you stretch a point in such a case, and persuade yourself to believe —"

"*Mr. Warren*," she answered with a calm manner,

but with a nervous voice, "if I could do violence to my own soul, discard my faith at will, and call that error which the evidence of my reason, and every instinct of my being, affirms to be eternal truth, I might go a step further in my daring apostacy, and at last deem heaven itself a dream, and hell a fiction; and then it is not at the change you propose that I would stop. *There*," she said, and pointed to a spot where the ice was broken, and the rapid river was seen flowing underneath, "there lies my temptation; a refuge from the misery of this hour, and a less dreadful self-destruction than that which you propose."

Almost unconsciously, Mr. Warren laid hold of her as she leant over the bridge; but she turned to him, and a faint smile passed over her face.

"O, no! My guardian angel has not yet forsaken me. I believe," she said, and raised her eyes to heaven. "I believe, and I can afford to suffer."

"You think hardly of Protestants, Signora, if even a grave in that dark river would seem to you a better alternative than to adopt their faith."

"Say than to renounce my own," she eagerly rejoined; "*the* sacred truths we hold in common are part *of the creed* which I would rather die than forsake!"

"Then what is it you feel about us?"

"Inasmuch as you are Christians, the deepest sympathy — inasmuch as you are Protestants, an earnest hope that to the secret spirit God vouchsafes his inward revelations of light and of peace. Who can judge by what rays he illuminates the mind, or by what mysterious teaching he raises a soul to heaven and himself? but to abandon the truth when our hearts have received it, to cast away the pearl of great price that once was our's, to have had faith, and to lose it, to have knelt in breathless awe and in speechless adoration, when God had been near us and within us, and then, with our lips, to protest against, and in our acts set at nought, the greatest and most awful of His gifts to man — this is a moral suicide, which none but a Catholic can conceive, because none other can incur its misery and its guilt."

Ginevra's earnestness overpowered her, and she remained silent till Mr. Warren again addressed her.

"Heaven forbid that I should strive to persuade you to act against your conscience! I admit that if your convictions are unalterable, you cannot of course give them up; but in that case it is much to be regretted *that* you ever entered into an engagement be-

set with so many insuperable difficulties! Such a foolish, hopeless affair!" he repeated, with that sort of impatience which good-natured and matter-of-fact persons experience at what appears to them the needless sufferings which others entail upon themselves by giving way to their feelings; but he was touched by the mournful eloquence of Ginevra's eyes, which were raised to his with a kind of mute appeal from the sentence he had just pronounced. Again he suggested, and again she rejected the only alternative which presented itself to his mind, and at last provoked with himself and with her, and wearied with the discussion, he exclaimed abruptly, "Well then, keep your faith, and give up my nephew. You must choose between —"

"God and man," she solemnly replied; "thank you for those words; they have given me strength. Now let us return home. You said you could not help me, and you were right."

"You have a great sacrifice to make," replied Mr. Warren, "but young as you are, and with a long life before you —"

"*Yes*, a long life — perhaps as long as his," she *added in a low voice.*

"You will feel satisfied at having released him from a painful position. As the cause, though the innocent cause, of his ruin, you never could have been happy."

Once more she glanced at the smooth river at her feet, and then at the blue vault of heaven over her head.

"Now you will both start afresh in life; you will have nothing with which to reproach each other."

"No, we must not reproach each other," Ginevra mechanically repeated; and they walked on in silence, except that Mr. Warren now and then made an observation tending to enforce the necessity of the sacrifice he had urged her to make. When they were within a few steps of the house, she suddenly stopped, and said in a low deep voice, "Are you *sure* that you have told me the truth?" There was such intense misery in the tone with which this was uttered, that Mr. Warren startled, and felt shocked at having been the means of inflicting it, but he could not retract, and the tear that glistened in his eye gave a death-blow to her hopes. He felt then for her, but saw no means of escape. She pressed his hand, went up to her room, and was *alone for an hour*, looking her fate in the face, and

struggling against despair. It was true, as she had said it herself, that Ginevra Leslie was very young for the load of care, for the heavy burthen which weighed on her spirit, and taxed the energies of a character which nature had made ardent, and to which education and circumstances had taught self-control. Full of that indomitable fire which genius kindles and passion nurses, she had taken life and its mysteries and its realities, as if by storm, and at thirteen she had ceased to think, to speak, or to feel as a child. The strong religious principles which grew with her growth, and modelled her whole being, grappled with that nature, and curbed its impetuosity. Her imagination, her talents, her enthusiasm, had been directed to one end by the influence of a religion, which, while it is ascetic in its discipline, and uncompromising in its morality, deals with each human being according to his secret needs, and purifies while it exalts every aspiration of his soul. She had seen in the gorgeous temples of her own land the riches of earth, the precious marbles and the sparkling gems, the gold of the mine, and the pearl of the ocean lavished in profusion on the shrines of the *Almighty;* and she had learnt, at the same time, that *the precious* things of man's heart and of man's brain,

its pearls of great price, its treasures of deep thought, its gems of countless value, should be laid upon the altar of God, not to be destroyed, like the holocausts of old, but to be hallowed and exalted by the light of the sanctuary. Every inspiration that raised her soul from earth was directed to heaven; each burst of enthusiasm was sanctified by a sacrifice; the consciousness of superior power was incitement to new exertions, and the revelations of her own genius, startling appeals, to which she responded with uplifted eye and with bended knee. When the day of trial came, the same influence saved her from despair.

Her story was a strange one, and must now be briefly told. Consigned in her infancy to the care of her mother's relations, she had been brought up in an old mansion, whose departed grandeur had left traces of its existence in the fresco paintings which still lingered on its walls, and in the mutilated statues, the broken fountains, and the avenue of cypresses which ornamented its gardens. One suite of apartments in this abode was occupied by Father Francesco, who was at once the friend and the chaplain of the owner of that old palace. His name has already been mentioned in this story as the uncle and the guardian of

Ginevra Ferrari, the mother of our heroine. The simple furniture of these rooms contrasted with the magnificence of the gilded ceilings and the painted walls. One small gallery, that led from the hall to the chapel, was well stored with books, French, Latin, and Italian. A writing-desk that stood by one of the high windows, and a pile of heavy folio volumes that lay at its side, gave indication that their owner had not neglected to improve by study the abilities with which Nature had endowed him. The chapel was rich in comparison with the rest of the building; and the relics of past splendour, which elsewhere had been suffered to decay, were carefully cherished, and seemed to render a silent homage to the sanctity of the spot, where night and day a lamp burned before the altar, and shed a mysterious light on the carved effigies and the sculptured walls of that secluded shrine. On the opposite side of the building another lamp often burned through the long hours of night, and still faintly glimmered when the glory of the rising sun overpowered its feeble rays. This was in the studio of Leonardo Ferrari, the artist, who some twenty years before had been the friend and *the compa*nion of Ginevra's father. Devoted to his art, *engrossed by* that ruling passion, day and night he

worked with an unwearied energy that left him no time for rest, and no care for the outward world. The only object that won a smile from the ardent painter, or beguiled him for an hour from his own life-destroying toils, was his sister's child, the little Ginevra, whose voice and whose eyes were the music and the sunshine of his lonely existence. In that singular home, like a flower that blooms unseen on the walls of a ruined cloister, she spent her childhood and advanced towards womanhood.

Between the aged priest, whose treasure was in heaven, and whose spirit seemed only to linger on earth for her sake, and the impassioned and often disappointed artist, who found in her presence and in her youthful enthusiasm, a refuge from the feverish dreams that pursued him, her young life took its course, and her young spirit its direction. Other circumstances also combined to mould her character and her mind, and to stamp them with originality. By her father's express desire she had been early instructed in English, and furnished with a library which comprised all the best works, both ancient and modern, which could give her a familiar acquaintance with English literature. She had studied Milton as much as Dante, and loved

Shakespeare better than Ariosto. The rich stores of English philosophy, of English eloquence, and of English poetry, sunk into a mind which the blue skies of Italy, and the deep sense of what was beautiful in nature and in art, had ripened into early maturity. She learnt of Father Francesco, whether on her knees in the chapel, or with her books at his side, to connect every emotion with a duty, every exertion with a prayer, and in the homes of the poor, or by the beds of the dying, these lessons assumed a reality which no subsequent impression could efface. No whisper from the world without had disturbed the even tenor of her life; the pale water-lily floating on the silent pool of the deserted gardens in which she loved to wander, seemed an emblem of herself, of her unsullied purity, of her calm existence, and of her unnoticed beauty. But the time was approaching when the storms of life were to sweep over that tranquil surface, and stir up in its source that well-spring of suffering which lies hidden in the depths of every human destiny. First came the day when a sacred duty, an imperative summons to a distant scene of action, called away Father Francesco *from his* home, not as had been often the case before, *for a few* months, but for an undefined and uncertain

period. The first tears that had filled Ginevra's blue eyes since the day of her infancy, flowed in speechless sorrow as she received his parting blessing, and for the last time knelt at his side at the same place where, some years before, he had received her first confession, and now his voice had faltered slightly, as he concluded the sacred rite, and pronounced the words of dismissal, "Go in peace, and let us pray for one another." They had been the last she had heard from his lips; this had been her wish and his; long must they be treasured in her heart, long must be her struggles, and fiery her trial, before the same voice shall speak — if ever, on earth, it shall speak again of peace in her ears.

Alone with Leonardo Ferrari, she exercised for a few months a ministry of consolation — a mission of tenderness, which required all her intelligence and gentleness to sustain. His spirit had been too keen, — his sensibility too ardent, — the visions of future fame too delusive, and the disappointing realities of life too overpowering for health of mind or of body to remain unimpaired. A desponding languor, or a feverish restlessness, alternately depressed his spirits or *harassed his* nerves. With more talent than skill, with

more genius than power, he toiled day and night, won praise from others for productions from which he himself turned with disgust; and the while his strength was failing, and his life slowly ebbing. Like an angel of peace, Ginevra stood beside him, and sometimes her words or her caresses would soothe his agitation, and win a smile from his care-worn spirit; he would cast aside his brushes, turn away from his easel, and suffer her to lead him out into the balmy atmosphere of an Italian spring, into the beautiful gardens of the Palazzo Giusti, or into the picturesque streets of Verona. Gradually, as his strength diminished, he seemed more indifferent to the objects which he had so ardently pursued. He would look mournfully round his studio, and contemplate with a painful earnestness the picture which twenty years before he had painted in Rome, and which was the original cause of Leslie's marriage with his sister. He had never parted with it, and now that the evening of his life was closing in, it seemed dearer to him than ever; the memories of the past took the place of the eager anticipations of the future, and they seemed to concentrate upon Ginevra as the sole link that connected them with the present. But the *frame was sinking*, and the mind was worn out, sore,

and disturbed; it could not dwell with calmness on any subject of interest; and the more intense grew his affection, the more acutely self-tormenting were his thoughts. She was consigned to his charge — she was alone in the world — her father in India, Father Francesco in South America. They had left her to him; they had thought him young still in years, energetic in character; and youth, and strength, and life, were failing. He felt as if he could have died in peace had her fate been decided, and her happiness secured. His restless eyes would wander from her mother's picture to herself, and an almost fierce impatience possess him when she smiled gaily upon him, and moved about that silent mansion like a ray of sunshine in the house of mourning.

About ten months after Father Francesco's departure, a young Englishman came to Verona, and visited the studio of Leonardo Ferrari. The same picture which so many years before had riveted Colonel Leslie's attention, captivated his fancy. While he lingered near it, he happened to glance at the garden below, and saw Ginevra tying up some of the roses which hung in garlands from one cypress tree to the other, and smiling at the little peasant girl who was gather-

ing into her lap the shower of rose leaves which fell about her head. It was a pretty picture, and for a few minutes Edmund Neville watched it, and then started with surprise as a sweet and powerful voice — an Italian voice — sung in English, only with so much of foreign accent as gave the words a pretty distinctness, the song in Cymbeline:

"Hark, hark, the lark at Heaven's gate sings,
And Phœbus gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
On chaliced flowers that lies;
And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes,
With everything that pretty bin:
My lady sweet, arise!
Arise! arise!"

These words were adapted to an Italian air, and the effect was altogether so peculiar, that he felt as if he was dreaming; and from that day began a dream of bliss which ought never to have been yielded to, or never to have been dispelled. He came to gaze again on the face that had bewitched him — on the voice that had entranced him. He lingered in the studio, he visited the chapel, he explored the ruins, he spent hours and days with Leonardo, whose spirits seemed to revive in this intercourse with one whose manners *and whose* language reminded him of the only happy

period of his blighted existence. He told him the story of Colonel Leslie's second marriage, and the secret of Ginevra's half-English origin. He clung to his society with a morbid predilection, and when he saw the signs of dawning passion in his piercing eyes, and the impetuous workings of that passion when once aroused, he felt as if a load of care had been removed from his breast. He saw that the spell that had bound him was as powerful as it was intense, and that Ginevra herself, at first unconsciously, then with heart-misgivings, and at last with all the earnest tenderness and simplicity of her character, yielded to its influence, and in return for his ardent and devoted affection, gave the deep enduring love of her young heart. He saw it and rejoiced, for he never doubted the purity of Neville's intentions, and he would have done him injustice if he had. Whether such a temptation had ever crossed his mind in the early days of his intercourse with Ginevra, and before he was aware of her relationship with Colonel Leslie, none can tell; but if it ever did, no traces of it remained, as he became acquainted with her character, and instinctively felt that she was one of those with whom, even in thought, he dared not connect aught of shame or dishonour. The

only son of over-indulgent parents, whose prejudices he had never yet opposed, of whose boundless kindness to himself he had repeated proofs; far from his own country, from his old associations, he lost sight of the immense difficulties which a marriage with Ginevra would present. Blinded by passion, he foresaw indeed that his father would refuse his consent if it was asked, but never doubted for an instant that if his marriage was accomplished he should soon be received into favour, for he knew that his parents would be punishing themselves by withholding their forgiveness; the alliance with Colonel Leslie's family was honourable, and the fact of his second marriage had long ago been recognised by his relations. His only desire, therefore, was to obtain Ginevra's consent to an immediate union, and in this object he was well seconded by Leonardo; to him he diminished the amount of opposition which his family were likely to offer to his wishes, and from her he altogether concealed it. He was of age, he was independent, his parents he told her had always wished him to marry young. Colonel Leslie had been a friend of his father's at college, and *would certainly* approve of his daughter's marriage *with an* Englishman, whose fortune was ample, and

whose family was ancient. Ginevra was inexperienced, and totally ignorant of the ways of the world, but her instinctive delicacy of feeling, and tenderness of conscience, revolted from the idea of marrying without the express consent of her own Father, or of Father Francesco, and with her arm round Leonardo's neck, and a deep blush on her cheeks, she implored him not to urge her to become Neville's wife for at least a year, and to write to both her absent guardians, before a final consent was given to —

"To your happiness, Ginevra, and to what will secure my peace of mind — to what will enable me," he vehemently continued, "to die without the anguish of leaving you alone in the world — to die without the burthen of earthly cares to draw my soul back from the opening vision of eternity."

Ginevra pressed his hand to her heart, and her lips quivered.

"You are quite wrong in supposing," he continued with feverish eagerness, "that I have not the right to sanction your marriage. You know how uncertain all communication with Father Francesco must inevitably be; and as to Leslie, he had but one fear which, through *your childhood, has* ever haunted him, and that is that

you would take the veil, and never see him again but through the grate of a convent parlour. He made me promise that I would never consent to your residing, even for a short time, in a monastery, lest it might induce you to renounce the world."

"There is no danger," she said, and gazed at a letter in her hand, one of Neville's ardent and impassioned declarations of eternal affection; "no hope of it," she added, and her tears fell fast on the paper.

"I have promised," continued Leonardo; "I have promised, and now when I die, Ginevra — when I have left you alone in the world — child of my heart! where will you go, what can you do? Fair as an angel, and helpless as an infant, who will care for thee, who will watch over thee? my flower, my treasure, my spotless lily. You do not know all I know. You cannot understand the dangers — the difficulties that will beset you. Here, in your home, you may not remain when I am gone; and if —" a sudden thought blenched his cheeks, and his agitation grew so great that he almost gasped for breath.

"*I can* never be alone, never forsaken, Leonardo *mio*," she gently whispered, and kissed his burning

brow. He was ill, very ill, and fever and weakness were struggling for mastery in his exhausted frame.

"One last effort I must make," he feebly murmured, and raised himself on his couch. "Ginevra, if you did not love Edmund Neville, I would not ask you to give me peace at the expense of your own — to ease my aching heart and my harassed brain at the cost of one sigh or one tear of your's —"

"Oh!" exclaimed his niece, as she fell on her knees at his side, "if I did not love him I might obey you, and not tremble; but —"

"You do love him; your heart is his, and nothing stops you but a vague misgiving —"

"A nameless terror," she murmured. "O, Father Francesco! Father Francesco!"

"You know that Edmund has promised you the free exercise of your religion — that he respects your faith. Ginevra, my strength is failing. Hear my dying prayer. Do not call obstinacy conscience, or self-will self-sacrifice, Ginevra, dearest!"

A change came over his face, an expression of such intense anxiety that the poor child at his side could withstand it no longer, and murmured in broken accents —

"Do with me as you will, uncle Leonardo."

At that moment Edmund Neville joined them, the pale thin hand of Leonardo grasped his, and in a faint voice he said —

"She has promised."

The flush of joy in his dark eyes, the rapture with which he thanked her, the transports of happiness which he evinced, and the look of repose with which her uncle laid back his head on the pillow, and the faint smile which flitted over his coutenance as Edmund knelt at her feet, and imprisoned her hand in his, and gazed on her pale fair face, as if his life depended on her smile, all failed to give Ginevra that security which her throbbing heart so much needed. She had now promised, and she must not by her misgivings throw a gloom on the eve of her marriage-day, and poison the bliss of her lover, and the peace of her uncle. She smiled sweetly on both, and she prayed much alone in the chapel; but, about to be united for ever to one whom she loved and who loved her with such passionate devotion, she had no intoxicating dreams of future happiness — no brilliant anticipations of the life she was entering upon — something whispered to her heart that all was not right; and when she drew near the

altar her step faltered, and the hand she placed in his was as cold as ice. For a few weeks after her marriage, nothing realised this presentiment. Leonardo seemed to revive at the sight of their love — it carried him back to the days when Leslie and his sister had also wandered under the same shades, and drained their cup of bliss in the short period of their married life. But this reprieve was only the last expiring effort of sinking life; his malady increased with fearful rapidity; and about three months after the marriage, he died with Ginevra's hand locked in his, and his eyes fixed on Edmund Neville with an expression of mingled confidence and supplication — a dying appeal, which seemed to embody the hopes and the fears which at that last hour were haunting his departing spirit. A few weeks after his death Ginevra was walking with her husband in the avenue near the Casa Masani, and for the first time since that event her grief was giving place to a feeling of enjoyment, which the calm beauty of the evening, and the glorious radiance of the sunset sky, was shedding in her soul. In the morning she had attended a solemn service for the repose of that spirit which on earth had been so restless — so keen in its aspirations — so self-tormenting in its delusions

— and the silence of nature, in that her twilight hour, seemed to harmonise with the prayer which was still rising from her heart, with the sacred accents which were still lingering in her ears — and Edmund kissed away the tears that were slowly coursing down her cheeks, and watched with eyes that told a tale of passionate love for the answering smile that, like a ray of moonlight on the waters, had more sweetness than brightness, and more tenderness than joy. Edmund seldom spoke of the future, and she never asked. In her character and in her religion there existed a strong principle of self-oblivion; not merely the self-abnegation which can make sacrifices, but the forgetfulness of self which in religion produces an unlimited surrender of our whole being to the will and the disposal of Him by whom and for whom we were made; and in human affections, a devotion which forgets what it gives in gratitude for what it receives, and when even that poor return is withheld, takes refuge in the consciousness that "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and is grateful still for its own boundless capabilities of loving and of suffering. Edmund's will was her law; *Edmund's* happiness was her object; her own she *seldom* thought of. But as they sat together that night,

she felt a sense of happiness steal over her heart, and her spirits rose as Edmund told her that his love for her increased every day, that she was the joy of his soul, the one object for which he lived, the one being on earth for whom he would give up life and all things else, and all those impassioned truisms, those sublime common-places, which have been uttered by human lips and have thrilled in human hearts from generation to generation, and will be uttered, and will be believed, and will do their fatal or their harmless work, on to the time when time shall cease to be.

"Here is Ginnetta," said Ginevra, as the little Milanese waiting-maid approached, with something raised above her head.

"A post-letter, Signora," she exclaimed, and threw it into her mistress's lap.

It was directed in an English hand to Edmund, and he seized it with impatience, and tore it open. A dark cloud passed over his face as he read it. His colour deepened, his eye-brows contracted, his lip curled, and his whole bearing denoted agitation. He rose from the bench where they had been sitting, and walked up and down the avenue with hurried steps. When a *vague presentiment* of evil has haunted the soul, and

it suddenly fastens on the truth, it encounters it with a desperate calmness that astonishes itself. Ginevra had never explained to herself what she feared; now she seemed to understand it at once, and like a flash of lightning through her brain darted the thought, — "He is ruined, and through me!" Her hopes, her fears, her fate, her peace, were nothing — less than nothing — dust in the balance, — in comparison with that one thought. She went up to him and said, gently, "Edmund, I must see this letter. There must be no secrets between us." He was rolling the paper in his hands while his eyes were darting fire, and his thin lips were tightly compressed. There was a mixture of childish passion and fierce concentered resolution in his countenance and in the tone in which he repeated, without listening to her —"

"They *shall* yield, by heaven, they *shall* yield."

She turned very pale, and leant against a tree for support.

"Edmund, have you deceived me?" she faintly murmured, but did not repeat the words, when he turned towards her with a look of love and misery which pierced her to the heart, and held out his arms to her. She sank on the seat by his side, and took

the letter from his hand; she read it, and a thousand new and startling thoughts seemed to rise in her mind during that moment. She understood the past; she foresaw the future; a fearful revolution was taking place within her. In his blind and selfish passion, this man who was by her side, who was holding her hand, who was watching her while she read, — this man had made her the instrument of his own ruin; had placed her in her unsuspecting helplessness, between himself, and duty, and honour, and happiness, and there — there she must remain, like the angel's sword in the apostate prophet's path, where the hand of God had placed her, — and from that path of duty and of misery she must not swerve. She saw it, she felt it; her heart sickened within her, her brain almost gave way; reason would have forsaken her, even love might have failed in that her hour of need, — but religion was there, and the torrent was stemmed, and the path was clear, and the victory was won. The past was irrevocable; the future must be met by him and by herself in the spirit of expiation, — where sin or error had been; of resignation, — where the sin or the error had been involuntary. No reproach passed her lips: there was reproach, and he felt it, in the increased paleness of

her cheek, and in the tremulous accents of her voice as she asked him in a subdued tone —

"And *now*, my Edmund, what can we do?"

He hid his face in his hands, and remained silent. He dared not tell her how desperate was the struggle in his heart between his passion for her and his reluctance to forego those worldly advantages which his marriage with her threatened to destroy. It had never occurred to him for an instant to suppose that his father had the power, even if he had the will, to disinherit him, and this stunning intelligence was communicated for the first time in the letter that informed him of the strength and of the inveterate nature of that father's prejudices against the religion which his wife professed. The faint rumour which had reached his home, and which was supported by his prolonged absence, of an attachment formed in Italy, had raised in that home such a tumult of anger and apprehension as can be conceived only by those who have had to deal with characters such as that of Neville's father — too earnest, too conscientious, too lofty, not to inspire respect and attachment; and too stern, too inflexible, *not to* create despair in the hearts of those who see no *point by* which to approach, no weakness by which to

soften, no emotion by which to work on its rugged conscientiousness and its smooth impassibility — and Mr. Warren, who was at that time travelling in Italy, was implored by his sister, Edmund's mother, to find out her son, to warn him, to save him; to adjure him by all the sacred ties that bound him to his family and to his country, to return at once to England, and to break off any intimacy which must inevitably end in bringing dishonour on the object of his attentions; — or, if he should be so reckless, so infatuated, so mad, as to think of marriage, — expose him to the endless resentment of his father, to the loss of all his worldly prospects, and to an eternal separation from herself. Mr. Warren was perfectly ignorant of his nephew's movements, and inclosed a letter to him to the banker, at Geneva, which was the last place from whence Edmund had written to him; he communicated to him the substance of his mother's letter, and added to it such legal particulars as gave to her expressions an overpowering reality. This was the news that had fallen like a thunderbolt on the heart of Ginevra's husband, and never did a more fearful storm rage in any human breast than swayed his in that hour. He loved her *ardently; and* even in that moment did not regret that

he had bound her to himself by irrevocable ties; she was his, and must be his for ever; but the threatened consequences of that act must be guarded against, and his marriage remain a secret till such time as he should succeed in overpowering his father's objections; or, at least, in weakening the strength of his prejudices. Perhaps, also, some vague hope crossed his mind that he might work a change in her religious creed, and then the daughter of Colonel Leslie, and the convert to Protestantism, would be hailed by his family as the most welcome bride he could present to them. But it was difficult to look Ginevra in the face, and to propose to her a course of long and arduous dissimulation. It was difficult, while his protestations of boundless devotion were still echoing in her ears, to condemn her to a humiliating silence, and an equivocal position. Her eyes were still fixed on the fatal letter, and she was repeating, as if to persuade herself, of the fact — as if hoping against hope —

"He did not know it; he was deceived himself."

The flush of burning shame was on Edmund's cheek; he drew her to himself, and whispered —

"Ginevra, you love me?" She pressed his hand to her lips, with more of unflinching devotion than of

passionate affection. Perhaps he felt it, for with violent emotion he exclaimed, "Ginevra, you despise me." There was no scorn in her eyes—there was no resentment in her heart—there was no thought of herself,—of her own bitter disappointment, of her endangered happiness, of her hopes deceived, and her confidence abused at the altar where she had surrendered her life, her fate, into his keeping, — and thrown at his feet, to be crushed or cherished at will, all save her faith on earth and her hopes of heaven. But in her face and in her soul, in her quivering lips, and her clasped hands, there was an expression of indescribable emotion as she looked at her husband, who, overcome with agitation, had again hid his face in his hands, and was vainly striving to address to her the words which were rising to his lips.

At last, with a strong effort, he mastered himself, and in rapid and incoherent language described the impossibility of owning his marriage at once, and braving the anger of his father. He told her that for her sake, as well as for his, he must use prudence and discretion in this matter; and as he spoke, he sought to deceive himself as well as her, and partly succeeded. Every word that he had said to her before marriage, every

evasive answer with which he had baffled her timid but oft-repeated inquiries about the sentiments of his family, were present to *her* mind, as he rapidly detailed the difficulties that beset their path, the dark clouds that hung over their destiny, and the plan of conduct they must follow. Still she did not reproach him, but once she laid her hand on his and said —

"Edmund, you are the master of my fate, the ruler of my destiny. Ignorant and helpless I cannot withstand your will, or over-rule your decisions; but bear with me for a moment. I would not give you pain, dearest, or add to the bitterness of this hour; but pause, pause before you engage yourself and me in a course where truth will be a danger and deceit a duty. The sufferings of this hour (her voice faltered and her hand trembled) are the result of —"

"My boundless love for you—it knew no measure, Ginevra, and it feared no dangers."

"Be true to it, and to yourself," she exclaimed; "take me to the feet of your father, and let my deep love, and my fatal ignorance, and —"

"Your too bewitching beauty, your too transporting *loveliness*," interrupted Edmund, as she stood before him, with tears streaming down her cheeks, and a

deep flush tinging those cheeks which were usually as pure and white as the Parian marble.

"Plead my excuse and yours," she continued. "O Edmund, dearest Edmund, *truth — truth*, for Heaven's sake *truth*, and then misery and wretchedness, if God pleases. Life is short, my beloved, and eternity is long."

She was looking more beautiful then than the instant before, for her eyes were raised to heaven, and the spirit of hope and faith was kindling in her glance and shining on her brow, but she had risen too high for him — she had scaled the mount where he could not follow, and soared through the clouds he could not pierce. The sound of those words, *misery and wretchedness*, had dragged him down to earth again, and he exclaimed with bitterness: —

"Proclaim to the world, if you will, that we are married. Refuse to grant me the short period of delay and of silence which I ask, and we are both undone; or consent for a while to submit to a painful necessity. Bear for my sake a few months of trial and suspence, and then—at your feet, in my arms, my Ginevra," — he continued, as he knelt before her, and drew her *fondly to his breast*, "and then years of bliss will fol-

low, and in their sunshine you will forget, you will pardon the clouds which have obscured the first dawn of our happiness. You will forgive me, dearest, for having bound you to myself, for having seized on the priceless treasure of your love, and taught you to suffer through me — for me," he added, as her lips were pressed to his, and she murmured:

"Must you leave me, Edmund?"

"Not now, not yet."

She turned very pale, and said no more. That evening she glanced at her wedding-ring, and then drawing it from her finger she passed through it a black velvet ribbon and hid it in her bosom.

"If not there — *here*," she said, and in this simple manner gave her assent to the trial she was about to endure.

What tears she shed in silence — what deep tears that day's anguish left behind it, what fears haunted the night that succeeded it — fears such as those of a child who walks in the dark, who clings with terror to the hand that leads him, but which he dares not wholly trust, — none knew but herself. But there *was a* light in her path even in that stormy hour; and *narrow* as was the way she trod, a ray fell upon it

and each step she took was firm, though the next was hid in darkness.

During the days that followed, Edmund was, by turns, gloomy and desponding, or joyous and sanguine, according as imagination presented to him the future in a dark or in a bright aspect. He was distracted about the present, and tortured his brain to devise some plan by which he could leave Ginevra in safety, and hasten to Ireland himself to pave the way towards the acknowledgment of his marriage. One morning, after he had spent a night of restless agitation, letters were brought to his wife, from her father, and from the English consul at Genoa, informing her that Colonel Leslie was returned to England, and on receiving the news of Leonardo Ferrari's death, had written to direct that his daughter should proceed to Genoa, there to join Mr. and Mrs. Warren, old friends of his own, who were on the point of returning to England, and who had agreed to take charge of her. There was a note enclosed in the packet from Mrs. Warren herself, written in a courteous and friendly tone, and expressing the pleasure she felt in the prospect of making Miss Leslie's acquaintance, and offering to come herself and *fetch her from* Verona, if it would be more convenient,

or more agreeabe to her. Agitating and complicated as the state of things was becoming, a smile crossed Edmund's countenance, at the strangeness of the coincidence which thus appeared to throw his wife under the protection of his own relations, and hazardous as was the step, and great as appeared the risks that attended it, he soon came to the conclusion that the summons must instantly be complied with, and the difficulties met as they arose, and braved if they increased. This turn in their affairs would enable him to proceed alone to Ireland, and Ginevra, once established in her father's house, acknowledged openly as his daughter, idolised as she must be by all who came near her, would stand in the eyes of his family in a very different light from the Italian girl, the niece of an Italian priest, the very name of whose country, and of whose creed, would be abhorrent to their most cherished prejudices. The sight of her father's handwriting strangely affected Ginevra, and for the first time a sense of guilt and remorse took possession of her soul. Instead of being, (as poor Leonardo had assured her,) in some remote part of India, he was *returning* to his own country at the very moment when *she had* married without his consent, and she must

meet him again with a secret in her heart, and in his home und by his side bear his own name, which she had neither the right to assume, nor the power to forego. Almost a child in years, quite a child in guileless simplicity, she was to begin life with a woman's heart, and a woman's hardest trial — married, she was to bear the torment of suspense and the burthen of long concealment — innocent, she was to endure the trembling anxiety, the keen apprehension of guilt — she almost flinched from the task, and her courage well nigh forsook her. But even remorse — if the nervous regret, the newly awakened pang of recollection could be termed remorse, where even error had scarcely been — was not selfish in that pure heart and gentle spirit. Her sin, for such she now called it, was confessed in deep penitence, and each suffering in store for her she hailed as the purifying expiation which God would appoint and at last accept. On the following day, she spent an hour in the chapel, where she had so often knelt, and in the place where she had received Father Francesco's parting blessing, she prayed for him, and her heart whispered that he was praying for her. Perhaps it was his prayer which was obtaining for her at that moment the peace and the strength

she so much needed. As the shades of evening were closing, Edmund Neville came to fetch her. He had stood without the church, and leaning against the column, he had heard her sobs faintly audible in the silence of the darkening aisle, and he had writhed with the pangs of self-reproach, and the bitter grief of parting; and when through the heavy folds of the curtained door she glided out into the moonlight, and stood before him with a smile of divine sweetness and calmness, his soul melted within him, and weeping like a child, he fell at her feet, and implored her forgiveness. She put her hand on his lips, she kissed his forehead, she murmured a blessing in his ear, and smiled through her tears. At last it was she who tore herself from his arms, who pointed to the travelling-carriage which was waiting at the gate, and who spoke of hope and of courage, as he almost cursed himself for the misery he was inflicting upon her and upon himself. It was not till she had lost sight of him, that she trembled at the thought of what the morrow would bring forth.

Instead of proceeding to England at once, he *lingered for* some weeks secretly in the neighbourhood *of Genoa*, where a long illness of Mrs. Warren's pro-

tracted their stay. To catch a glimpse of his wife as she passed through the rooms of the Palazzo — to meet her for an instant in the streets, and exchange a few hurried words with her, was the whole object of his days, for separation and uncertainty had augmented tenfold his passion, and almost robbed him of his senses. At last she left Genoa, and then he travelled day and night to England. When he reached his home he found his parents in utter ignorance of the object or of the nature of his attachment; and before he could speak on the subject, two hours after his arrival, his father led him to the window, pointed to the ancestral trees, the wide lake, the smiling villages, the parish church, whence at that moment the bells were pouring forth a joyous peal in honour of the return of the heir of those broad lands, and said, in a slow and impressive manner —

"Edmund, if ever in a moment of infatuation it should have crossed your mind to ask my consent to your marriage with a Roman Catholic, dismiss at once and for ever that thought, for I swear," and he laid his hand on the large family Bible which was placed on the table, "by that sacred book, and that Heaven *which it reveals*, never to grant it. I have made your

mother promise not to hear one word from you on this subject, or even to allow you to name to her the person, whoever she may be, who has suggested to your mind the possibility of such a marriage. Now we understand each other."

He laid his hand on his son's shoulder. If he could have read into that son's heart, even his own stern spirit might have quailed.

After Mr. Neville had left the room, Edmund remained gazing on the well-known scenes, which even in their wintry garb were clothed in so much beauty. There was not a spot which did not remind him of his childhood, or of his boyhood, and the wild moaning of the wind through the leafless branches of the elm trees was in his ears as the music of bygone days. The sound of the gong, as it startled him from his attitude of contemplation, had also a familiar tone, and in his own room the views of the Lake of Killarney, and of the Giant's Causeway, the crooked China monsters on the chimney, the few books and old pamphlets on the shelves, the embroidered screens, his sister's birth-day present, all carried him back to *a time* and a state of things he had almost lost sight *of during* the year he had spent in Italy. He went

down to dinner, and in the old family portraits, the sword hanging over the chimney, (a relic of the battle of the Boyne) which he had often in his infancy climbed on a chair to handle, the large picture between the windows of the siege of Londonderry, all served to warn him of the deeply-rooted religious and political prejudices of his family. He was silent and abstracted, and the conversation was chiefly sustained by his father and the clergyman of the parish. It often touched on the state of the country, and the religious animosity which prevailed in it. His heart sank within him as he listened to the bitterness of party feeling, which appeared in every word that was uttered; and when in the family prayers that night, Mr. Neville solemnly implored that his household and home might ever be preserved from the inroads of infidelity and popery, and never harbour a Papist among them, the image of Ginevra rose before him as she had stood, with her meek and fervent eyes raised to Heaven, pleading with him the cause of truth and of eternity. The next day he rode with his sister, Anne Neville, through the lanes and the villages which lay within his father's estates, and was cordially welcomed by the *tenants.* When he observed all that had been done to

promote the comfort and the welfare of the inhabitants, and listened to the various details she gave of the schools which she superintended, of the new church which they were building in one spot, and the cottages they were erecting or improving in another, and watched her intelligent and animated countenance while she was speaking, he felt a new interest in the place, and a new sympathy with her. Anne Neville was one of those persons who, without any brilliant qualities or extraordinary charm, carry with them, through all the details of life, a quiet gaiety, a calm good sense, and a degree of modified and gentle obstinacy, that works its way and gains its end where more exalted or more dazzling qualities and powers might fail. She had more kindness than feeling, and more perseverance than zeal. She observed to the utmost the duties of her religion, and had little indulgence or sympathy for those who believed, or who practised more or less than herself. Without any vanity, (for praise and blame seemed equally indifferent to her), she had the very highest respect for her own understanding, and anything she did not herself discern, or feel, or conceive, was unhesitatingly set down as enthusiasm, or *delusion*, or perverseness. She never seemed to imagine

that there might be depths in the human heart which she had never fathomed, needs in the human spirit which she had never experienced, bearings and relations between creeds and actions which she had never investigated, or indeed that there were more things in Heaven and Earth than were dreamt of in her philosophy. Too gentle in character to be ever violent in her expressions, too upright to be uncharitable in her judgments, she quietly brushed away from her path, and put aside from her consideration, everything that did not precisely tally with her own pre-considered opinions. A clever American writer* has said that there are some points of belief which we must not be always reconsidering, but which must at once be placed on our shelves for daily use, and not for critical examination. Anne Neville's opinions were *all* of that nature, and there was no apparent crevice through which a new impression could have been inserted in her well-arranged, but closely packed understanding. That Edmund should have sympathised with his sister may seem extraordinary; but who has not felt that when they have suffered much through the intensity of their feelings, or the vividness of their fancy, there is a

* Jacob Abbott.

strange repose in the quiet round of daily duty, and of practical interests, which a well-regulated life presents. His love for Ginevra was connected with recollections of vehement joy, and of passionate emotion; her religion was the obstacle that stood between him and happiness; the source of acute misery to himself, and of tormenting anxiety for the future. He was capable of, but had no taste for strong excitements, and he easily persuaded himself that it was to Ginevra's religious creed he felt a rising repugnance, and not merely to the difficulties it placed in his way. There is so much that is excellent and attractive in any form of earnest religion, and old habits and associations have so much influence on the human mind and heart, that as he looked upon Anne with admiration and interest, he conceived an ardent desire, which soon amounted to a strong conviction, that his wife might be brought to adopt her views, and embrace the religion of her sister-in-law. He could not contemplate without dismay the possibility of foregoing, or risking the possession of those hereditary estates, which appeared to him more valuable than they had ever done *before; and* as he observed increasing proofs of the in*flexibility* of his father's character, and felt himself

every day becoming more incompetent to contend against that iron rigidity of purpose; or even supposing the will to be equally powerful in both, he was conscious that in the struggle, all the advantages of position were against himself. Now, then, for the first time, the idea suggested itself to his mind that *Ginevra must give way.* He remembered how young she was; he tried to persuade himself that her convictions were not deeply rooted, and that the example of others, his earnest solicitations, and the force of circumstances, might, after a short time, effect the result he so ardently desired. So confident did he feel of success, that his spirits rose, and he amused his imagination with various pictures of the time when he should declare his marriage to the astonished world, and bring Ginevra home in triumph to his delighted family. His first step was to write to Walter Sydney, and propose to pay him a visit at Heron Castle. There were some matters of business pending between their two families, concerning the lands of Darrell Court, that were adjacent to Mr. Sydney's, which furnished a plausible pretext for this proposal. He felt an intense curiosity to see Ginevra's father and sister, and an inexpressible interest in observing all

the peculiarities of that house in which she was so soon to be received under such strange circumstances.

Reckless as he was, he could not divest himself of a nervous reluctance to enter Colonel Leslie's house as a common acquaintance; and this, combined perhaps with an involuntary misgiving on Walter's part, occasioned the delay in his introduction, which had so much tantalised Margaret at the outset of their acquaintance. When he met her at Mr. Thornton's, the sound of her voice, and something peculiar in her expression, which reminded him strongly of his wife, almost baffled his self-command. When Walter's accident forcibly brought about his domestication at Grantley Manor, he shook off these feelings, and applied himself to the closest scrutiny of the characters, the feelings, and the opinions which would be likely to influence Ginevra, and to tell on her actions. Margaret especially, he watched with unremitting attention; but it was an attention so wholly selfish — his thoughts were so entirely absorbed by his own cares and projects, that it never once occurred to him that he was attaching her to himself and endangering her peace of *mind.* Once he was on the point of confiding to her *his perilous* secret, but rejoiced that, by leaving him

abruptly, she had saved him from committing what, on subsequent reflection, appeared to him in the light of a fatal imprudence. Once, too, he was inclined to consult Walter Sydney; but he, too, had checked the communication he was about to make to him, and the estrangement between them, that had begun soon after his arrival at Grantley, deepened so visibly, that he soon forsook all idea of imparting to him the truth. And when in those brief moments of intercourse with Ginevra, which he could contrive to obtain after her arrival, he felt with a kind of helpless despair, that, devoted, tender, humble, and patient as she was, ready to bear everything from him, and everything for him, on the one point on which his hopes and his projects turned he spent his strength in vain; that his desperate efforts, his cold resolution, his fiery resentment, his subtle reasonings, and his passionate entreaties, swept over her constancy like the spray over the rock, leaving traces of its passage indeed, secret tears and silent pangs, but making no way, and gaining no hold; when he saw this, he rejoiced, with a sense of escape from danger, that to no one had he confided the secret of the ties that bound them. He had tried her by every *means in his power*, and utterly failed. Jealous, rest-

less, and miserable, he could scarcely bear his existence or command his impatience. He loved her with passion, and to leave her was misery; and yet to stay and day by day conceal his feelings, and watch her at a distance, and scarcely dare approach her, or for one moment fix his eyes upon her, or linger by her side — this was a torment he could scarcely endure. That his father should conquer in their trial of strength was conceivable, and irritating as he felt it, he could scarcely wonder at the result; but that that gentle creature, all sweetness and submission, — that child of seventeen, whose heart was so entirely his, — should baffle and thwart him, and triumph over all his efforts to subdue her resolution and force her compliance, caused him at times such transports of rage, that he almost doubted if it was not hatred rather than love that he felt for her. But when he thought of going, of leaving that house in which she lived, that place where he could at least see her, hear her voice, and give way to alternate outbursts of anger and of tenderness, then he felt, by the pang that wrung his heart, that he loved her too deeply, too ardently, for the peace of his self*ish and* impetuous spirit. Her devotion to her father, *her tend*erness for her sister, her intimacy with Wal-

ter, the admiration she inspired to casual visitors, and the tone in which she was addressed in spite of the reserve of her manners, as one at liberty to receive the homage and the attentions of others, were all sources of indescribable torment to him. It appeared as if every one about her had greater claims upon her than himself, and yet he was her husband; if he chose it, he might at once snatch her from that house, separate her from her family, and assert his right to her exclusive devotion. Sometimes he persuaded himself, in his suspicious irritation, that she did not wish their marriage to be declared, — that she had ceased to love him, — and that, despising him for his selfish cowardice, she felt satisfied with her present position, and willing to cast him off for ever. Her very patience and sweetness angered him; and sometimes he, the deceiver and the tyrant, would think of himself as injured and ill-used by his victim, because she only suffered in silence, and wept in secret.

On the day that preceded his departure from Grantley Manor, which was alluded to in the last chapter, he had received a letter from his sister, which mysteriously hinted at a report that had reached his parents, *and thrown them into the greatest consternation.* She

entreated him to return at once to Clantoy, and relieve their minds from the suspense they were enduring. Perplexed and distracted, he resolved partly to confide in his uncle, Mr. Warren, and informed him of his attachment to Ginevra, slightly alluding to some previous acquaintance he had formed with her in Italy, and consulting him on the best mode of obtaining his father's consent to their marriage. He found his own impression of his father's inflexibility tenfold confirmed in this conversation, but at the same time a strong confidence expressed in the likelihood of Ginevra's conversion to the Protestant faith, if the urgency of the case was placed before her, and suffered to gain upon her mind by imperceptible degrees. Edmund's hopes were revived by this view of the subject; he began to hope that others might wield this engine of persuasion more effectually than himself, and he determined to leave the case in Mr. Warren's hands, while, in accordance with his sister's wishes, he himself for awhile returned to Ireland. But when he met Ginevra on the terrace of the park, on the evening of that day, and they stood alone together, with the dark wintry sky *over their* heads, and the gloomy future weighing on *their hearts*, the conflicts of grief and passion, of love

and anger, burst all bounds. Her spirit rose in that hour, and the smothered fire which had mouldered so long in her breast, kept under by nights of prayer and days of struggle, broke forth at last, and the passion of her Italian nature shook, and almost convulsed her fragile form. As, in her own tongue, she poured forth the story of her wrongs, and shuddered herself as she told it, deep, deep into her own heart and into his she dived, and brushed aside, with impetuous and overpowering reasoning, the vain subterfuges by which he sought to keep the truth from her grasp; unrolled the past before his shrinking glance; and then, with his hand in her's, and pointing to Heaven with the other, exclaimed —

"And when at the last judgment-seat you stand, how shall you answer to Him who made you, for having tempted a human soul into destruction? No, Edmund, no," she continued, while a torrent of tears fell on his hand, which she still clasped with both her's. "No! you will never have to answer for such a crime. The day will come when you will bless God that I could withstand your tears, and wring your heart."

She left him abruptly, for the sound of footsteps

had that moment startled them: but he was going the next day, and her conscience reproached her for her vehemence, and her heart smote her for what, in her sensitive tenderness, she called unkindness. Through that long evening, not one glance of affection could she obtain — not one token of pardon. She longed to kneel at his feet, and she could not even meet his eyes, or address to him a word. As the time of withdrawal drew near, her misery and her anxiety knew no bounds. When the dog, the old dog that had been the favourite companion of their walks, and the object of their care during the first weeks of their marriage, broke into the room, she felt as if he had come to plead for her, in that their first hour of real estrangement, and through the verses which she addressed to that mute intercessor, she made an appeal to the heart which pride and resentment had closed. The well-known air, which he so often had sung with her in her brief days of happiness, and the words of which formed an answer to her prayer, was a pledge of reconciliation. They met again, and the tears that were shed by both, and the silent pardon which each asked *and obtained* from the other, and a few faint expres*sions of hope* on his side, and words of patience, of

trust, and of tenderness on her's, and a long embrace, and a mute farewell, and that page of life was turned over; and the stormy interview with Margaret that followed it, opened a new era in Ginevra's singular existence.

END OF VOL. I.

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